Fall 2006

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

Hope after the Hurricane

Will New Orleans Become the New City of Choice?

KATHRYN G. NEWMARK • VERONIQUE DE RUGY

IN THIS ISSUE:

Teaching Boys and Girls, The National Standards Debate, NCLB's Flawed Measuring Stick, Singapore Math Muzzled in Maryland, Phony Phys Ed, Can Cory Booker Save Newark's Schools?

CONTRIBUTORS: JAMES PEYSER, DAVID SKINNER, ROBERT GORDON, MICHAEL PETRILLI, BARRY GARELICK, BOB CULLEN, THOMAS DEE, JOHN CAWLEY, PAUL PETERSON

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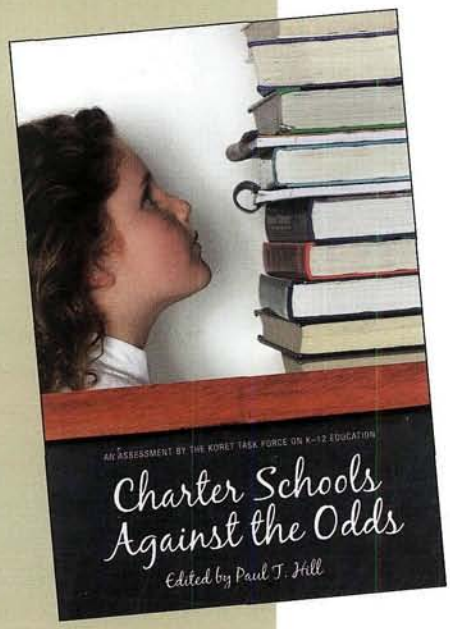

Charter Schools against the Odds

Edited by PAUL T. HILL

Charter schools—born into a hostile environment—are publicly funded schools operated by independent groups under contract with government agencies that provide a valuable alternative to traditional bureaucratically operated school districts. But state laws and policies have stacked the deck against them by limiting the number of charter schools allowed in a state, forbidding for-profit firms from holding charters, forcing them to pay rent out of operating funds, and many other ways. *Charter Schools against the Odds* explains how these policies can be amended to level the playing field and give charter schools—and the children they serve—a fairer chance to succeed.

The contributors show the ways schools have coped by improvising, relying on contributed time and money, avoiding the most hostile environments, and taking risks when the needs of children required it. They also present valuable ideas for policy changes—explaining how charter schools can be strengthened by a combination of changes in state law, public investments in performance-based school oversight, and private initiatives supported by philanthropy—and they tell why establishing a more level playing field would stimulate even more innovations in years to come. Perhaps most important, they suggest how charter supporters can organize to make changes happen.

Paul T. Hill is a research professor in the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs and director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, both at the University of Washington.

Contributors: John E. Chubb, Chester E. Finn Jr., Paul T. Hill, Caroline M. Hoxby, Eric Osberg, Paul E. Peterson, Brad Smith, Nat Torinus

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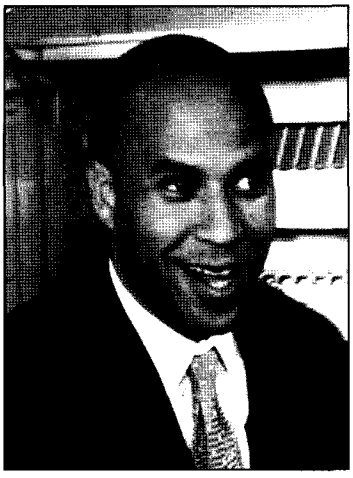

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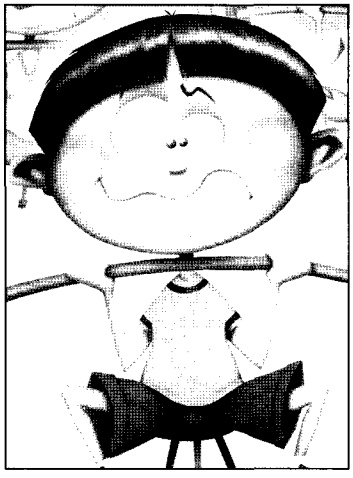

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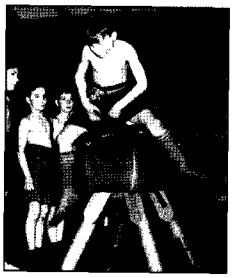

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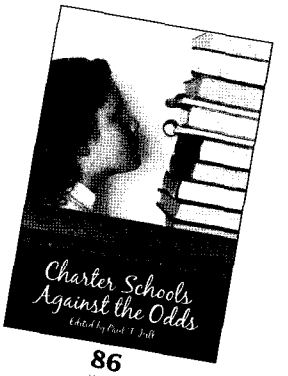

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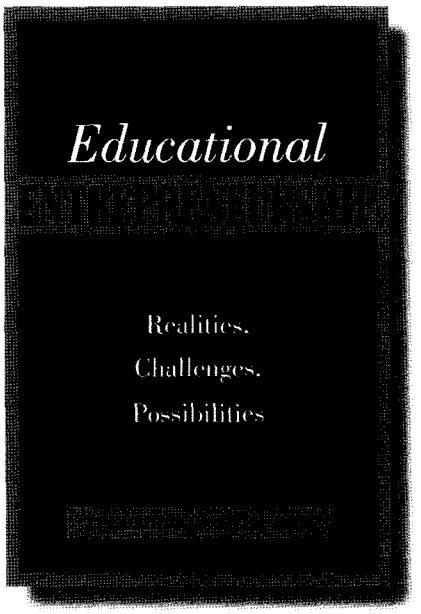
EDUCATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

REALITIES, CHALLENGES, POSSIBILITIES

EDITED BY FREDERICK M. HESS



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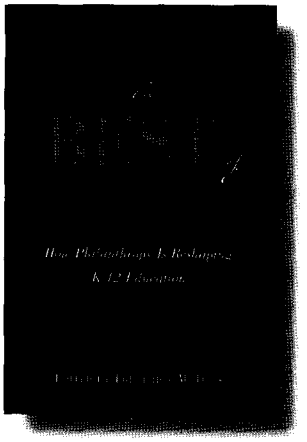

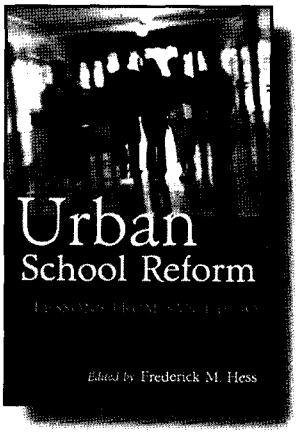

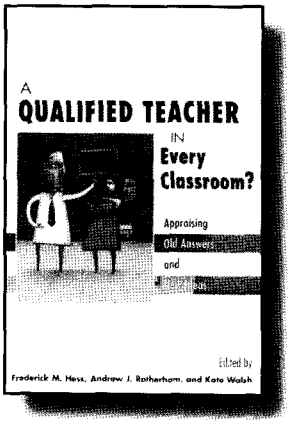

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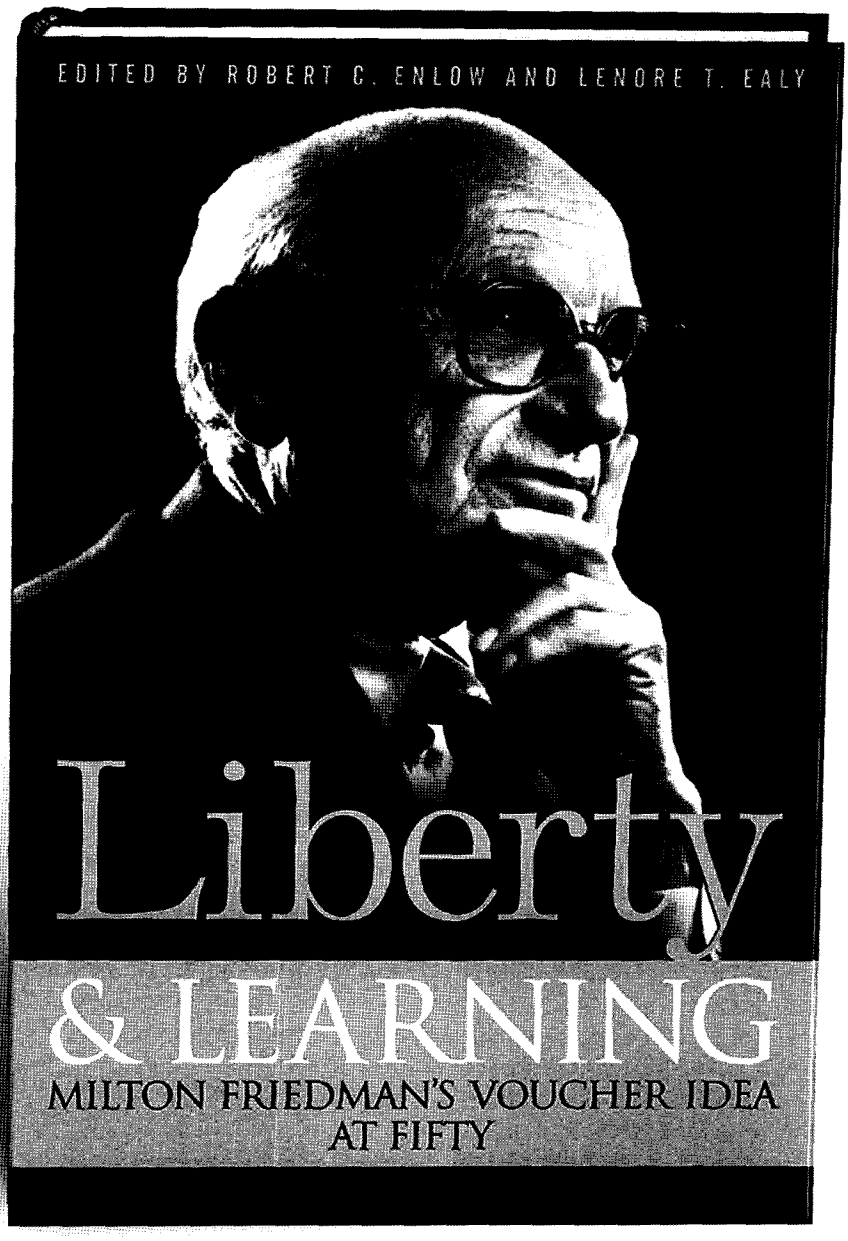
Milton Friedman's groundbreaking essay, "The Role of Government in Education," launched the modern school choice movement. He made a case for government policies that ensure universal access to education, but could not find justification for the government's operation of schools. This volume reassesses the merit and relevance of that argument for the 21st century.

"Thanks to half a century of accumulated research, we can now assess who was right: the intellectual majority or the 'eccentric' champion of market education."

– **ANDREW J. COULSON,**
Director of the Center for Educational Freedom, *Cato Institute*



FROM INSIDE THE BOOK

"My guess is that the Friedmans are bored with reading how right they are, so perhaps they will appreciate the effort if not the substance of my critical treatment here of the strategic prospects and needed tactics for advancing free-market school reform."

– **MYRON LIEBERMAN,**
Chairman, Educational Policy Institute

"Choice is the precondition for the growth of a particular brand of school that seems to work best for at-risk kids. It's the brand of schooling that seems most effective at instilling academic skills and knowledge while also promoting the 'common set of values' that Milton Friedman, 50 years ago, saw as essential to the survival of a 'stable and democratic society.'"

– **ABIGAIL THERNSTROM,**
Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute

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Learning from Catastrophe Theory

What New Orleans Tells Us about Our Education Future

Did Katrina blow away a city's educational cobwebs? Will New Orleans enjoy a school renaissance? Can catastrophe theory explain the properties of school reform as well as the dynamics of physical systems?

In this issue's cover story, Veronique de Rugy and Kathryn Newmark say it's too early to know whether a catastrophe has swept away one of the country's most corrupt and ineffectual school systems, replacing it with a network of competing, privately managed charter schools. But after the wind, rain, and waters of Hurricane Katrina had subsided, only the city's private and charter schools had the wherewithal to reopen in a timely fashion.

Most public schools were bogged down in mud and wreckage that was as much political as physical. By June 2006, only 12,000 of the 65,000 public school students had returned to school. And most of them were going to the five pre-existing charter schools—or to the 13 new ones formed in the wake of the disaster. Meanwhile, 20,000 of the 26,000 students in private schools were back in class.

Is New Orleans a metaphor for what could happen to the American public-school system nationally? Can a new birth be borne of catastrophe?

It does not take a confirmed curmudgeon to dismiss such notions. Political change in the United States occurs incrementally, a tiny step at a time. One should not expect much more than a haphazard accountability system, some boutique charter schools, a few scattered virtual schools, and perhaps a tiny voucher program.

The forces of the status quo are deeply entrenched. Teacher unions, school board associations, schools of education, state departments of education, and the halls of Congress all resist fundamental change. The American public, though uneasy about the current state of the country's schools, is not yet aroused to the point where it is willing to sweep aside institutionalized barriers to reform.

Even when school reformers seem to gain a beachhead, the complexities of the American governmental system, with its endless veto points, slow reform's expansion. Too often what is won in one legislative chamber dies in another, or is vetoed by the governor, or is found unconstitutional by politicized judges. And any reforms that survive the political gantlet can still end up choking on administrative dust.

With school systems stagnant, high-school students graduate without learning any more today than they did two generations ago. According to the "nation's report card," the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), high-school reading and math scores have hardly budged in 35 years. In science, student scores are actually falling, this despite the incredible rate of scientific discovery in our lifetime.

In a world of rapid technological change, schools that cannot teach science are no more in equilibrium than an upturned house balanced on its peak.

Yet in a world of rapid technological change, schools that cannot teach science may be no more in equilibrium than an upturned house balanced on its peak. Systems that appear to be impervious to external shock can nonetheless be quickly transmogrified. The Soviet Union, even more bureaucratized than American public schools, collapsed in a week.

Within the United States, a phoenix has more than once risen from the ashes. Out of the Chicago fire and the San Francisco earthquake came new urban designs and architectural forms that brought forth the great cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Out of the riots of the 1960s appeared an awakening that built the foundations for a multiracial society. Today, an oil spike, coupled with rising oceans and powerful storms, is creating a bipartisan, pro-conservation consensus on energy policy. In each case, advances came at the expense of vested interests that had long exercised with near monopoly power.

Will New Orleans finally get a viable school system? Is it a harbinger for what could happen nationwide? Reformers should take heart—but be wary nonetheless. Those beholden to powerful interests will try to eclipse the sun and forestall the dawn. They know what's at stake—and they read catastrophe theory, too.

— Paul E. Peterson

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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The Bostonian

Tom Payzant had an extraordinary ten-year run as superintendent of schools in Boston, as described in Alexander Russo's fine story ("The Bostonian," *features*, Summer 2006). Although it's hard to remember now, Boston public schools were in free fall a decade ago, with a dysfunctional school committee, a series of short-term superintendents, and a rudderless education program. Notwithstanding the venerable Boston Latin School, the district's image was defined by the chaotic Jeremiah Burke School, which lost its accreditation as Payzant was walking in the door. Payzant established order and stability. Under his unwavering leadership, the district turned its focus to improving the quality and consistency of instruction. His forthright support of state graduation standards, at a time when other superintendents were praying for a reprieve, was critical to the success of the Massachusetts education-reform efforts.

Although Payzant was open to stretching the boundaries of the established order (as his push for Pilot Schools demonstrates), he was primarily concerned with getting the most out of the existing system. To a very great degree, he succeeded. Through his persistence, skill, and thoughtfulness, Payzant achieved as much as any superintendent could have, given the constraints. Indeed, compared to most other urban school districts, Boston is a major success story. And that's the fundamental problem.

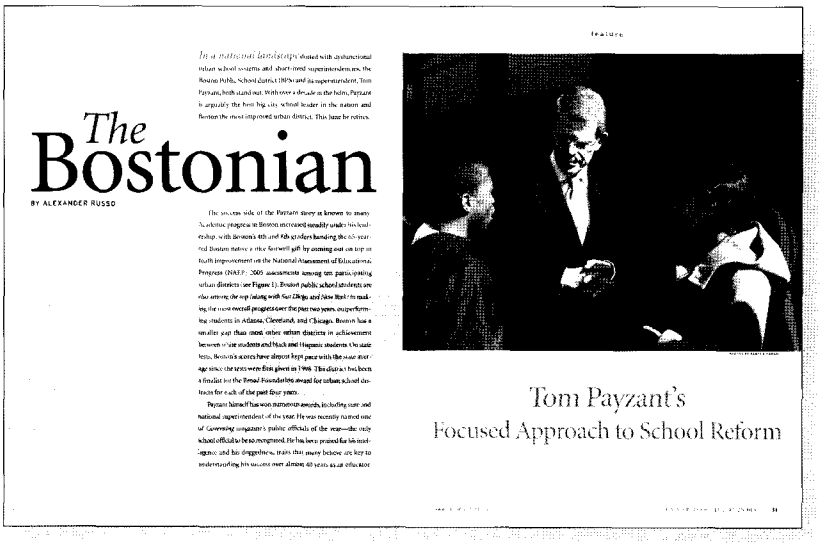
After ten years of exemplary leadership, Boston's students are still struggling. Today close to 70 percent of Boston students are performing below grade level in English or math (that is, below proficient on the state assessment). That's down from almost 85 percent in 1998, but only slightly better than the 75 percent rate in 2001. While further incremental improvement is likely, the trend line seems to be flattening out. Indeed, the proficiency rate went down slightly in 2005. As for the achievement gap, the story is much the same. The aggregate proficiency rate of black students in Boston today is about 35 percentage points below that of white students, almost unchanged since 2001.

The implications of this are not that Payzant's initiatives should be abandoned, but that they should be complemented by a much more aggressive effort to address the structural barriers that plague Boston and virtually all other urban districts, in order to open the district up to new talent and effective school models.

Despite being home to some of the best charter schools in the country, Boston has lost many of its most entrepreneurial and successful charter leaders to other states because of persistent opposition to charter schools. This is both a shame and a scandal. There is no excuse for not offering these proven schools and school leaders the opportunity to expand and replicate—in district buildings and with the wholehearted support of the central office. If this can happen in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Oakland, it can and should happen in Boston.

Absent a willingness to be bold and take risks, I'm afraid there is little hope that Boston public schools will realize the level of excellence that Tom Payzant has worked so hard and well to achieve.

JAMES A. PEYSER
Chairman
Massachusetts Board of Education


The Bostonian
BY ALEXANDER RUSSO
Tom Payzant's
Focused Approach to School Reform

No doubt Tom Payzant has done a good job in Boston. With a revolving door of superintendents being the norm for large city school systems, as well as dissension among community groups and low or stagnant student performance, the adjective "outstanding" is warranted in Payzant's case. Those who wanted faster change and larger improvement in achievement may prefer the term "modest," but in a period of faltering confidence in educators, it is reassuring to see a consummate professional have a long tenure and success, whether it is termed good, outstanding, or modest.

The Boston success story is about raising student achievement. But the Russo piece does not address the school completion rate, and it is low. To learn the lesson of Boston schools, we also need to look at what the city and its constituencies achieved. Discord has run many good educators out of big

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city school systems. There were disagreements in Boston, but the various organizations and interest groups shared enough of a common goal, acted with restraint, and achieved sufficient accord to keep a superintendent in place long enough to stay a course and reap positive results.

PAUL E. BARTON
Senior Associate
Educational Testing Service

Unions and Politics

It's hard to disagree with the analysis by Frederick Hess and Martin West ("Strike Phobia," *features*, Summer 2006) detailing how standard union contracts stifle education innovation, management flexibility, and results. The real debate is over what to do about these well-documented problems.

School board members, by and large, are not gripped by "strike phobia," but rather reflect a very rational fear of the political power of teacher unions. They also approach contract negotiations asymmetrically weaker. Their relative inexperience, high turnover, and part-time service constitute no match for the experienced, long-term, full-time union negotiators.

The remedies outlined by Hess and West (transparency, rallying the public, and increasing capacity of board members) are necessary, but not sufficient. Let me suggest a few others.

First, we need more models of reasonable union contracts. Charter schools are one outlet for trying out different collective-bargaining arrangements. Since charter school boards typically are not elected, they have greater freedom to negotiate more reasonable agreements.

Second, more parents need a meaningful "right of exit." School districts, especially urban districts, will not feel the public pressure to change unless a large segment of students are actually able to leave. Since most parents in urban districts are poor, we need a plentiful supply of well-funded vouchers, education tax credits, and tuition-free charter schools. Yet in most urban communities the number of available "choice" seats is very small when stacked up against the number of kids in failing district schools. Out of thousands of school districts, only three—Dayton, D.C., and Milwaukee—are currently on the cusp of offering sufficient scale to make a real impact.

Third, particularly in urban districts, shifting authority from school boards to an elected mayor may be a more effective reform strategy than trying to get school boards to step up. Mayoral control, which has shaken up the education establishment in Chicago and New York City, for example, needs to be expanded all over the nation. Mayors are not impervious to union politics, but their visibility makes them much more accountable than a multi-member, largely unknown school board.

THOMAS W. CARROLL
President
Foundation for Education Reform & Accountability

Frederick Hess and Martin West do not pull any punches with "Strike Phobia." As they say, school boards, superintendents, taxpayers, and politicians need to be less anxious about provoking teacher work actions in order to restore the balance of power in American public education.

Yes, the majority of our nation's teachers are passionate, professional educators who work daily to find the effective pedagogical formula needed to increase student achievement. But the majority of our unions, by their nature, exist to serve the needs of adults rather than those of students, and ultimately work to maintain the status quo of collective bargaining agreements that all too often serve as barriers to innovation, efficiency, and common sense. The struggle between management and teachers unions therefore plays itself out politically by pitting the "system" against the "teachers." This is a false dichotomy. In reality, the struggle is between the status quo perpetuated by collective bargaining agreements and the conditions needed to increase student achievement for all students.

MATTHEW H. MALONE
Superintendent of Schools
Swampscott, Massachusetts

Parsing Partisanship

The Summer 2006 issue of *Education Next* contains accusations about the research done by the Center on Education Policy ("Donkey in Disguise," *check the facts*). The work by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) on the No Child Left Behind Act, high-school exit examinations, and other education policies uses exactly the same research methodologies as those employed by the U.S. Department of Education, state legislatures (controlled by both political parties), and other entities.

The article also contends that the CEP is in reality a partisan organization. Although I worked for the Democrats on Capitol Hill for many years, I have always thought that education is too important an issue to be partisan. Therefore, when I crafted legislation in the three decades I was on the Hill, I tried to be bipartisan. Almost every meeting that I convened was for both Democrats and Republicans, and the results were that nearly every law I helped to write was passed by large bipartisan majorities.

When I established CEP, I carried that same policy of nonpartisanship into this work. The first chair of our board of directors, Christopher Cross, was a former Republican staff director on Capitol Hill and was also a political appointee in the George H. W. Bush

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administration. In the last several years, as we have tracked No Child Left Behind, we have been contacted by both Republican and Democratic members of Congress. We have happily helped all. This year, the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate and House education committees asked CEP to brief staff members on our organization's latest NCLB report. Members of Congress do not sponsor such bipartisan events if they believe you have a partisan agenda.

JACK JENNINGS
President
Center on Education Policy

When Jack Jennings created the Center on Education Policy (CEP) as a free-standing organization, he asked me, a clearly identified Republican who had been his nemesis on the Hill for six years and a presidential appointee in the administration of George H.W. Bush, to serve as chair of the board. I did so with the clear understanding that CEP would pursue an agenda that was not partisan.

The fieldwork for CEP has been undertaken by organizations with a reputation for scientific rigor and independent analysis. CEP cannot be responsible for how the media have played some of the findings. While the reporting by the media may not have been as balanced and thorough as we all would have liked, CEP did report the positive aspects of what it found. Unfortunately, positive results rarely get a great deal of media attention.

CHRISTOPHER T. CROSS
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Greg Forster replies:
Jennings points out that the Department of Education and state legislatures use "exactly the same research methodologies" as CEP. Sadly, this is sometimes true; I said the same thing in my article. Neither the Department of Education nor state legislatures (even Republican-controlled ones!) are exempt from the realities of politics. Junk science is junk science no matter who sponsors it.

Cross says CEP's research is scientifically sound because CEP hires prestigious organizations to carry out its surveys, which is like saying that a letter is truthful because it was delivered by a reliable courier. I'm sure CEP's surveys are conducted with the most meticulous care; my article criticized the way CEP analyzes the results of those surveys, a subject on which neither Jennings nor Cross offers any defense.

It's admirable that CEP has a Republican board chair and sometimes works with Republicans, but this hardly proves nonpartisanship. If CEP's research adhered to the generally accepted standards of empirical science, the mere fact that CEP also has policy preferences would not be a legitimate reason to doubt its findings. But when CEP uses faulty research methods that are rigged to support its agenda, other researchers have a responsibility to point this out.

High School

I read David Ferrero's review essay "Tales from the Inside: Five Books about High School" (*book reviews*, Spring 2006) with great interest. I grew up in a suburban community that went through a "population explosion" in the early 1960s and was fortunate to go to grade school and high school in newer facilities, like many of the kids interviewed in the books Mr. Ferrero reviewed.

My senior year in high school was marked by a teacher strike. The strike made me realize that while kids go to school, teachers go to work. Our teachers wanted better pay and benefits; a fairer process for tenure review; and fewer noneducational "babysitting" tasks. Today, I don't blame my teachers for their requests; as Mr. Ferrero points out, they are inherent to the dynamics between teachers and school boards and their full-time administrators.

But I agree with Mr. Ferrero that these dynamics must change.

Teacher development programs and partnerships between union and management could help new teachers succeed. It is in no one's best interest to see a new teacher fail.

We need a new approach to Advanced Placement. Why not consider tax credits for parents to send a bright child to college for a couple of classes, instead of placing the burden for instruction on public schools?

We need more flexible schedules. Summer school could help kids gain advanced standing and graduate early, just as it is used to help stragglers keep up.

Organizational change happens with leadership. I do not believe a superintendent must be an educator. A superintendent's skill set is more like that of a municipal business administrator: manage people with varied skills; negotiate contracts; arrange financing; develop facilities; direct budgets; and answer to voters.

STUART NACHBAR
Princeton, New Jersey

Keeping Out the Christians

Naomi Schaefer Riley claims that the University of California admitted only 8 students through its "admission by exception" policy last year, when the number was actually more than 1,000 students ("Keeping Out the Christians," *features*, Summer 2006). She also wrongly asserts that students from the Calvary Christian school would need to score in the top 4 percent of the SAT II (now called SAT Subject Tests) to gain admittance based on test scores. In fact, students can fulfill individual course requirements by attaining relatively modest scores—ranging from 530 to

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550 in science and social science subjects—on the SAT subject examinations.

Moreover, Riley fails to note that a large number of Christian schools, including Calvary, offer a full list of college preparatory courses that have been approved by the University of California (UC) system. Calvary has 60 such courses. In fact, all nine students from Calvary who applied to UC this year were accepted for admission, and well over 75 percent of applicants have been admitted over the last four years.

Perhaps more objectionable than the factual errors is the unfounded notion that Christians are being kept out of the University of California based upon their religious beliefs. Even the most perfunctory research will show UC campuses host literally hundreds of Christian student organizations. UC believes enrolling students from many different faiths and backgrounds enriches the university's community and the learning experience of our students. High-school courses are evaluated on the basis of academic criteria. As a result, the university sometimes must decline to approve courses from all types of high schools, not just Christian schools. The percentage of courses approved from Christian schools has been basically *identical* to the percentage approved from all schools. Christian schools are treated no differently than any other type of school.

CHRISTOPHER M. PATTI
University Counsel
University of California

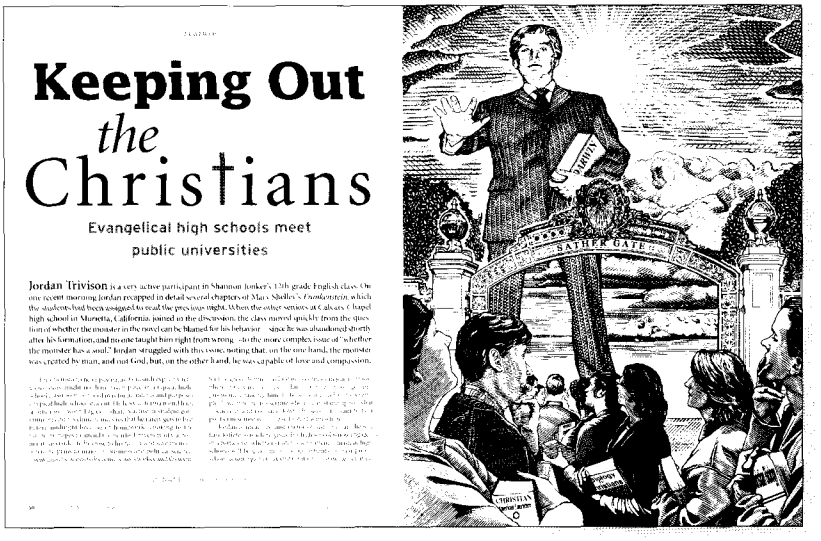
Naomi Schaefer Riley replies:

Mr. Patti is correct that the total number of admissions by exception is not 8. According to public records recently obtained by the lawyers for the Association for Christian Schools International (ACSI), the number was 871 for the 2004-2005 school year. About a third of those exceptions were used for athletes who did not qualify for admission under the regular rules. Many others were admitted, I gather, for outstanding artistic talents, or because there were other special circumstances involved (they may be veterans, for example). Students admitted by exception still make up a tiny percentage of the approximately 50,000 freshmen allowed in each year. And one doubts that UC will be giving any of the slots of its prize athletes to well-qualified graduates of Christian schools. The number 8 is the number of homeschoolers who were admitted by exception, and it is still significant in this sense. These homeschooled students are in the situation most similar to graduates of ACSI schools because they generally have a rigorous academic courseload, but it is one that does not have UC's stamp of approval.

Mr. Patti and I can quibble over the numbers, but the bottom line is this: the counsel for a *public* university is trying to defend a policy of "*admission by exception*" for students who take high-school classes taught from a Christian perspective. He has not offered any explanation for why these students should have to go through an admissions process that is different from the one entered into by students who take classes in secular private schools or public schools or other religious schools. Indeed, there is no moral or legal justification for this policy.

The fact that the percentage of students admitted from Christian schools and secular schools is fairly similar is irrelevant, because the UC only launched these discriminatory policies in the last year. The fact that most of Calvary's classes are still counted for credit is also irrelevant. UC has changed its rules about the new classes it reviews and there's no reason that, with one pen stroke from a UC bureaucrat, the rules about existing classes couldn't change tomorrow.

Finally, I did not write that the University of California doesn't *like* Christians, but rather that the UC administration believes that Christian ideas are backward and water down academic subjects. As long as Christian schools in California are offering academically rigorous and substantive courses—which, from the looks of the curricula they submitted and my interviews with faculty, students, and parents, they are—there is no reason they should be subjected to a different standard.



Keeping Out *the* Christians

Evangelical high schools meet public universities

Jordan Trivison is a very active participant in Shannon Jonker's 12th grade English class. On one recent morning Jordan recapped in detail several chapters of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which the students had been assigned to read the previous night. When the other seniors at Calvary Chapel high school in Murrieta, California, joined in the discussion, the class moved quickly from the question of whether the monster in the novel can be blamed for his behavior—since he was abandoned shortly after his formation, and no one taught him right from wrong—to the more complex issue of whether the monster has a soul. Jordan struggled with this issue, noting that, on the one hand, the monster was created by man, and not God, but, on the other hand, he was capable of love and compassion.

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State Health Care Policy
Tarren Bragdon, Maine Heritage Policy Center

Doctors and Prescription Drugs
Dr. Richard Dolinar, The Heartland Institute

Public Health
Dr. Elizabeth Whelan,
American Council on Science and Health

Panel 2: Budget & Taxes

Public Pensions
Steve Stanek, The Heartland Institute

State Taxes
Sandra Fabry, Americans for Tax Reform

Federal Taxes
John Berthoud, National Taxpayers Union

Panel 3: Environment

Global Warming
James Taylor, The Heartland Institute

Ozone/Air Quality
Joel Schwartz, American Enterprise Institute

Energy Policy
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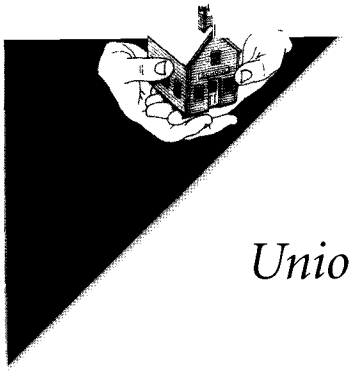

Virtual Legality

Unions and Home Schoolers Attack Internet Education

BY JOSH DUNN AND MARTHA DERTHICK

In the past, schools have tried to bring technology to the student in the classroom. Now technology makes it possible to take the student out of the classroom and even the building. In virtual public schools, students learn at home under parental supervision while a certified teacher monitors progress and assigns grades. Schools typically provide textbooks, a computer, a printer, and sometimes an Internet connection.

Not surprisingly, this new form of school is leading to new legal questions. Lawsuits brought against virtual schools have ended with victories for the defendants in Pennsylvania in 2003 and in Minnesota in 2005. Two recent cases in Wisconsin have had the same result.

Wisconsin has been hospitable to educational choice. State law authorizes charter schools as well as enrollment outside of a student's district of residence, provisions that together have made virtual schools possible. First to open was the Wisconsin Connections Academy (WCA), established in 2002 under a partnership between the Appleton Area School District and Sylvan Learning Systems. Two years later, the Northern Ozaukee School District started the Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA), which adopted a package developed by K12 Inc., a company founded by former U.S. education secretary William J. Bennett to provide products for virtual schools. Students can come from anywhere in the state, and the sending district reimburses the receiving district.

The student-teacher ratio for virtual schools is much higher than the ratio for "brick and mortar" schools, so virtual schools threaten to reduce employment.

The state's largest teachers union brought suit against both schools. In both cases the union claimed that the sponsoring districts had violated charter law by enrolling students who were not physically attending their schools. The union also claimed violations of open-enrollment law. In the first case, filed in Dane County circuit court, the complaint was that the more than $5,000 per pupil reimbursement to the Appleton district was excessive because it was based on the cost of a traditional rather than a virtual school. In the second case, filed in Ozaukee County's circuit court, the union complained that the open-enrollment law, like the charter law, permitted only actual attendance in the physical facilities of the receiving district. Both judges dismissed these claims. In the Dane case, an appeal failed.

In the Ozaukee case, which was decided in March of 2006, the union also advanced a wholly new claim: that parents, who play a large part in supervising instruction in virtual schools, are not licensed teachers, as required by Wisconsin law. On this issue as well, the judge ruled against the union. Although the state department of education was a defendant in the case, it sided with the union on this issue.

Union concerns presumably go beyond the legal arguments. The student-teacher ratio for virtual schools is much higher than the ratio for "brick and mortar" schools, so virtual schools threaten to reduce employment. Also, teachers, like the students, can work from their own homes instead of school buildings, which might tend to weaken the solidarity of the unionized work force.

In addition to teachers unions, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has opposed virtual schools. The HSLDA calls virtual schools a "Trojan horse" and an "attempt by the government to create small public schools in our homes." Many home-schooling parents apparently do not agree. They like the idea that they can get a return on their tax dollars while still shaping their own child's education. For the HSLDA, however, this can mean that parents no longer have an incentive to join their organization. In 2006, approximately 50 percent of WIVA students came from home-schooling backgrounds.

Enrollment in virtual schools remains small—in Wisconsin, a mere 1,460 students in 2004–05. But the numbers are increasing, and we know of no state in which a court decision has gone against virtual schools. As traditional schools increasingly allow students to supplement coursework with online classes, they erode the basis for opposition to virtual schools. If a virtual class works, why not a virtual school? If a student can learn Latin "virtually," why not English, science, and history?

Josh Dunn is a professor at the University of Colorado–Colorado Springs. Martha Derthick is professor emeritus at the University of Virginia.

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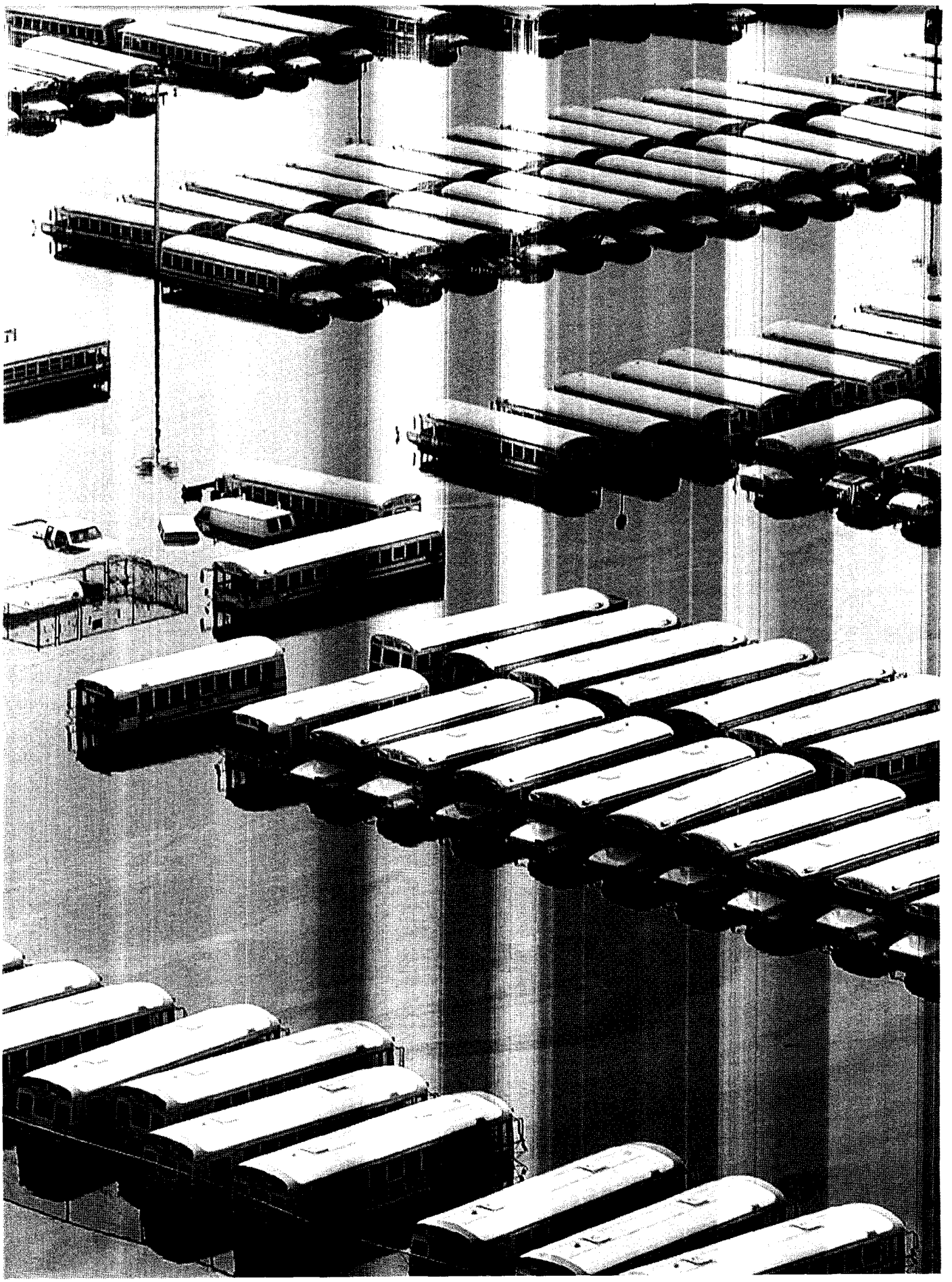

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Hope after Katrina

Will New Orleans Become the New City of Choice?

A student starting public school in New Orleans in the fall of 2005 had little reason to be hopeful about her education. Of her 65,000 schoolmates in the New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS), over half of those taking the state's high-stakes tests (4th, 8th, 10th, and 11th graders) did not have "basic" competence in math and English; 68 of the 108 NOPS schools receiving performance labels had been rated "academically unacceptable" by the Louisiana Department of Education, 13 more than just the year before (see Figure 1). Many of the city's high schools had double-digit dropout rates, and a state auditor, calling the district's finances a "train wreck," estimated that NOPS was running double-digit (in millions of dollars) deficits.

A student starting school in New Orleans in the fall of 2006, on the other hand, has some reason for optimism. There are now only an estimated 22,000 students and 57 schools in the district. Very few of them are being run by the New Orleans Public Schools; more than half the schools are charters and anxious to please, offering new curricula, longer school days, even special summer sessions.

What happened? The short answer is Katrina, the category 3 hurricane that pounded southeast Louisiana the morning of August 29, 2005, and devastated New Orleans, including its schools. The longer answer is that the destruction, terrible as it was, may prove to be the salvation of a school district that had been drowning for years. Politicians,

PHOTOS / AP WORLDWIDE

BY KATHRYN G. NEWMARK AND VERONIQUE DE RUGY

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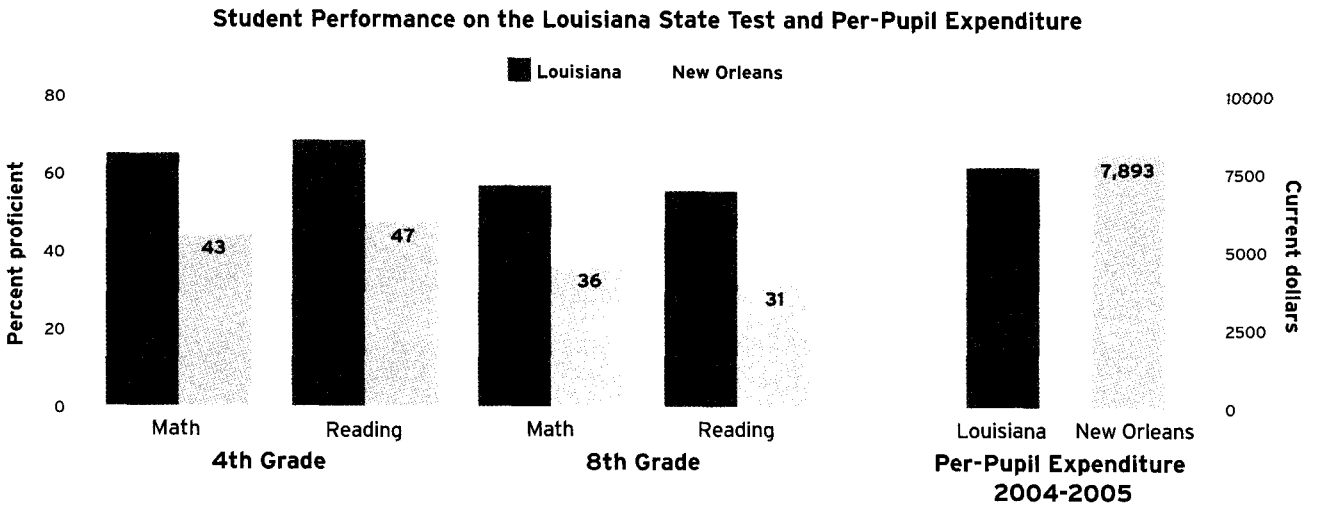
Scraping Bottom (Figure 1)

Before Katrina, the test scores of New Orleans students were well below the state average, but per-pupil spending was higher than elsewhere in Louisiana.



Note: Proficiency percentages are for the initial test takers in the spring of 2005. Data for Louisiana does not include New Orleans for either student performance or spending. Thus, the figure compares New Orleans to the rest of the state.

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education

educators, and parents, long frustrated with the state of public education in New Orleans, suddenly had the opportunity, as the waters receded, to build, almost from scratch, a new school system.

It will be years before we know the outcome of this major renewal effort. But already we can see outlines of the future. Before Katrina, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), which had run public schools in New Orleans, operated 123 schools; in the spring following the storm, it was running just 4. Before the storm there were 5 charter schools in a district of 65,000 students; by May of 2006, ten months after the hurricane, there were 18 charters in a New Orleans Public School district educating just 12,000 students (see Figure 2). It was, almost literally, a sea change in the organizational structure of the city's school system. Overnight, New Orleans, with nearly 70 percent of public school students in schools of choice, had become one of the most chartered cities in America. (In Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio, two of the most charter-concentrated cities up to now, only about a quarter of public school students attend charter schools.) No doubt, the hurricane was destructive. Some 85, or nearly two-thirds, of the city's school buildings had been wiped out or damaged by the floodwaters, at an estimated loss of $800 million. And tens of thousands of New Orleans residents, their homes and livelihoods destroyed, fled the city; Houston public schools alone absorbed more than 5,000 of the refugee students. It seemed that Katrina accomplished in a day—dismantling a derelict school district—what Louisiana school reformers couldn't do after years of trying.

The destruction, terrible as it was, may prove to be the salvation of a school district that had been drowning for years.

A Slow Road to Ruin

To many observers, it seemed quite plausible that if a hurricane hadn't closed them, New Orleans public schools would have tumbled on their own. The city had 55 of the state's 78 worst schools in 2003–04, and between 1998 and 2004 school enrollment had dropped by 26 percent, from 82,000 to 65,000 students. (The Orleans Parish population itself decreased by less than 1 percent, from 466,000 to 462,000, during this time.) Mismanagement and corruption were rampant.

"In the dismal gallery of failing urban school systems," wrote Associated Press reporter Adam Nossiter in April of 2005, several months before Katrina, "New Orleans may be the biggest horror of them all."

Exasperation with the district's poor management and record of

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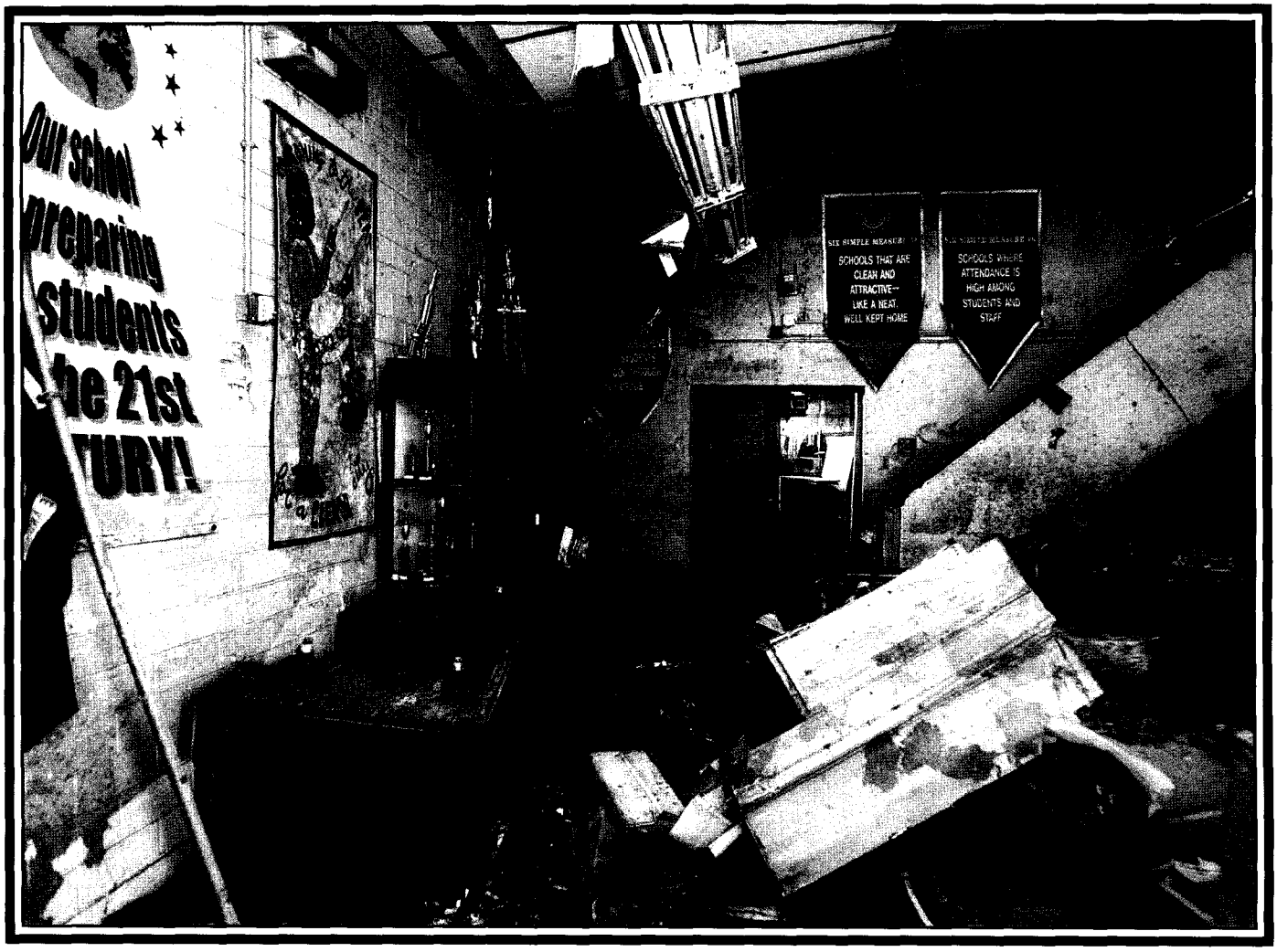
Our school preparing students the 21st
SCHOOLS THAT ARE CLEAN AND ATTRACTIVE— LIKE A NEAT, WELL KEPT HOME
SCHOOLS WHERE ATTENDANCE IS HIGH AMONG STUDENTS AND STAFF

Even after the shock wore off and city, state, and federal officials began talking about rebuilding, New Orleans school leaders were predicting that most schools wouldn't reopen for at least a year.

even poorer performance had already motivated many efforts to fix things. But almost as persistent as the district's low test scores and high dropout rates were the number of school superintendents—eight in seven years—who promised change and failed to deliver, swallowed up by petty politics and power struggles. One early effort at reform was a proposal from the University of New Orleans (UNO) in the summer of 2001 to create and oversee a new charter school district, converting 10 existing public schools to charters. But the school board and teachers union objected and UNO scaled the proposal down to managing just 1 charter school. Later, even that agreement fell apart over teacher contract issues.

In October 2003, over opposition from the Orleans Parish School Board, voters in the state approved a constitutional amendment, by a 60 to 40 percent margin, allowing the state to assume control of public schools that received an "academically unacceptable" rating four years in a row, applied retroactively so that failing New Orleans schools could be taken over sooner. And, in fact, of the 16 schools statewide eligible for takeover for the 2004–05 school year, 15 were in Orleans Parish. Those schools were made part of a "Recovery School District," run by the state but eligible to become charters if they wished.

The first takeover occurred in the summer of 2004 when the state handed control of P.A. Capdau Middle School to the University of New Orleans. Signaling the pent-up demand for change in New Orleans, more than 500 students applied for 264 spots at the revamped school, and more than 60 teachers applied for the 16 available positions. Pleased by this progress, the school board reversed its earlier opposition to UNO-run schools and proposed that the university operate more of them.

In the middle of this small burst of reform came Anthony Amato, a hard-charging administrator from Hartford with

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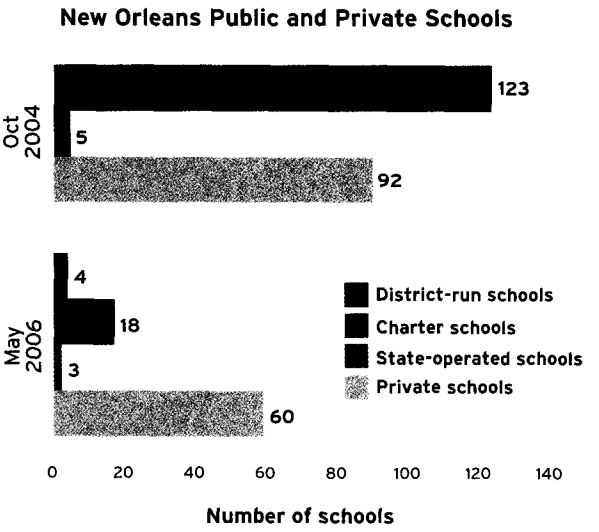
A Different World (Figure 2)

By the end of the 2005-06 school year, a changed education landscape had emerged in New Orleans.



Note: There were no state-operated schools in New Orleans in October 2004. Prior to the 2005–06 school year, four traditional public schools had already been converted to charter schools, one of which was not able to open after Katrina.

SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education

ambitious goals and a track record of succeeding in urban schools. Taking up the superintendent's reins in February of 2003, Amato promised to increase test scores and root out corruption. He demoted 20 principals, standardized literacy programs, and reduced student absenteeism by nearly 30 percent in his first year on the job. Typically, in doing the hard things, he rubbed many New Orleans school-establishment people the wrong way and by the middle of 2004, there was a movement afoot to fire him. "In 18 months," ran a headline in the July 2004 issue of *District Administration Magazine*, a national journal for K–12 administrators, "New Orleans Superintendent Anthony Amato has rid his district of ghost teachers and focused haphazard curricula. So why is he involved in a nasty fight to retain his job?" And though he had many supporters, including powerful state legislators who pushed through a special bill that transferred powers from the school board to the superintendent, Amato could not survive the disastrous financial reports, audits, and indictments that began flowing through his office in 2005, almost as a prelude to Katrina's tidal surge.

First, it was the state auditor calling the district a "train wreck" (this in early 2005) and detailing a list of abuses that included promotion policies that put people in jobs they were not qualified for and a district accounting office that employed "not one accountant." The auditor estimated that the system was running a $25 to $30 million deficit, but couldn't be certain because of the shoddy quality of the financial records. Then the U.S. Department of Education found nearly $70 million in federal money for low-income students either improperly accounted for or misspent. Finally, federal and state investigators, who had been looking at New Orleans since 2004, opened an office inside the school administration building itself. Their investigation resulted in two dozen indictments for theft, fraud, and kickbacks. (By early summer of 2006 there were 20 guilty pleas.)

Finally, at an April 2005 school board meeting that was "crackling with racial hostility," according to the Associated Press, Amato tendered his resignation. In late May the board finally gave in to the stark reality and hired the financial turnaround firm of Alvarez & Marsal (A&M), which was headquartered in New York City and had offices throughout the world (though not in New Orleans), to take control of hiring, firing, and contracting in the central office. Though the Orleans Parish School Board would still maintain control over the budget and the hiring and firing of teachers, A&M would report directly to the state superintendent and have the authority to appoint the district's top financial officers.

In a July status report, barely six weeks before Katrina, Alvarez & Marsal summarized the grim situation: "The conditions we have found are as bad as any we have ever encountered. The financial data that exists is (sic) unreliable, there has not been a clean audit since FY 2001-2002, there is no inventory of assets, the payroll system is in shambles, school buildings are in deplorable condition and, up to now, there has been little accountability." A&M, projecting that the district would "run out of cash by September," began to cut the budget by some 10 percent, and announced what it said was the first in a series of layoffs.

By the time Katrina struck and the levees broke that August morning, New Orleans schools were already listing badly.

A Difficult Restart

At first it looked as if Katrina would spell the end of all of New Orleans, including its schools. The city's students and teachers were quickly scattered around the country, and many had no plans to return. Students enrolled in new schools, including the thousands who entered the Houston public schools (altogether an estimated 250,000 evacuees went to Houston), and teachers found new jobs.

There wouldn't have been much to come home to: Alvarez & Marsal officials reported that 47 of the 128 New Orleans public schools were severely damaged and 38 more had moderate damage.

Even after the shock wore off and city, state, and federal officials began talking about rebuilding, New Orleans school leaders were predicting that most schools wouldn't reopen for at least a year. The undamaged buildings on the West Bank,

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With the city's tax base wiped out by the hurricane, New Orleans could no longer count on local funding for schools, nor would the tax revenue be available to back a pre-Katrina approved bond issue.

they said, wouldn't be ready for students until January 2006, and no East Bank schools would educate students in the 2005–06 school year. Even when school officials reassessed the situation and determined that they could reopen schools sooner than first thought, the district was immediately beset by the same old internal board conflicts, the same fights between the Orleans Parish School Board and state officials. At the September 15 board meeting, barely two weeks after the city had been brought to its knees, tensions boiled over in a racially charged session where, according to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "the battle lines were drawn." Board member Phyllis Landrieu, who is white (and the aunt of U.S. senator Mary Landrieu and Louisiana lieutenant governor Mitch Landrieu, who would lose a close race for mayor in the spring of 2006), proposed replacing acting district superintendent Ora Watson, who took over from Amato and is black, with Bill Roberti, who is the head of Alvarez & Marsal in New Orleans and white. The proposal failed. But it heightened racial tensions at a time when race had become as turbulent an issue as the storm.

As if that weren't enough, with the city's tax base wiped out by the hurricane, New Orleans could no longer count on local funding for schools, nor would the tax revenue be available to back a pre-Katrina approved bond issue. State funding would also decrease, as funds were redirected to other districts that had absorbed displaced New Orleans students.

But on September 30 came news that must have looked like a life preserver to many school reformers and would serve as a catalyst for change: a grant of $20.9 million from the federal No Child Left Behind charter school program. The money was earmarked to help Louisiana reopen existing charters as well as 10 new ones.

Immediately, school board vice president Lourdes Moran and state and local lawmakers representing Algiers

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(a neighborhood in the relatively undamaged West Bank district of the city) drew up a plan to charter all 13 schools in that area. And in what appeared to be an end run around the perennially contentious school board, Moran and Algiers legislators presented the proposal to an invitation-only group of some 20 business, religious, and other community leaders on October 5 without telling the school board.

On October 7, the day of the next school board meeting and with the board still unaware of Moran's plans (she had e-mailed the plan to her colleagues the night before, but according to *Education Week*, some board members and Acting Superintendent Watson said they hadn't had a chance to read the application before the meeting), New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin announced that he would ask the governor for help in creating a citywide charter school system. Nagin later explained that he had written a letter to Governor Kathleen Blanco on October 5: "Give me the charter schools I've been asking for—20 charter schools, a citywide charter school district." And on October 7, the day of the Orleans Parish School Board meeting, Governor Blanco issued several executive orders to smooth the way for charter schools in New Orleans. It was a measure of the school board's intransigence that, despite a devastating hurricane, a $20 million grant, and a ton of political pressure, the Algiers charter plan passed by only a 4–2 vote (with 1 abstention).

It was a measure of the school board's intransigence that, despite a devastating hurricane, a $20 million grant, and a ton of political pressure, the Algiers charter plan passed by only a 4–2 vote (with 1 abstention).

Board member Jimmy Fahrenholtz, a persistent advocate of reform, expressed his disgust at the nay-sayers, remarking, "[The state] should have taken us over a long time ago." Moran, who admitted that she had purposely kept her colleagues in the dark about the proposal, was amicable in victory. "I'm not saying that I want to do this because I want to change governance," she explained. "I am interested in making sure we access all the resources necessary to have a quality education."

There was some momentary drama when a group of mostly black leaders in Algiers won a temporary restraining order against the plan and Acting Superintendent Watson and board president Torin Sanders, who was one of the votes against the Algiers plan, began to talk about OPSB opening four of its own West Bank schools in November, but the resistance was short-lived. Alvarez & Marsal told the board that the district didn't have the funds.

On October 28, as the restraining order expired, the dissenting board members reversed course and OPSB unanimously approved 20 charter school applications, including 13 on the West Bank to be overseen by the Algiers Charter School Association (ACSA). OPSB required, among other things, that 20 percent of the students at each charter school be students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, and 10 percent be special-education students.

Meanwhile, New Orleans' private schools were already starting to reopen. In part because of its dismal public school system and in part because of a strong religious, especially Catholic,tradition, New Orleans had a robust private school network before Katrina: some 25,000 students, more than a third of the number in the public schools, attended 92 different schools. (Nationally, only 10 percent of K–12 students are enrolled in private schools.) And their relative importance only increased after the storm. By the first week of October, nearly 1,100 students were attending 2 Catholic schools in Algiers. Soon after, the first 3 private schools opened their doors on the East Bank, and by early November, 8 of the city's Catholic schools were open—all before a single public school, charter or not, had reopened anywhere in New Orleans. Even after the public schools began operating, the private sector proved more nimble. By the spring of 2006 there were nearly 20,000 students enrolled in private schools, three-quarters the prestorm figure, but well above the number that were back in public school (see Figure 3).

Starting Fresh

While the immediate impetus for the charter school plan was money, these new schools promised hope to a devastated city school system. The new Algiers Charter School Association emphasized the benefits of being liberated from Orleans Parish

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School Board policies, which, according to the association's application, "currently consist of over a one foot thick set of documents that have not been reviewed for consistency and necessity in the past 20 years." The charter schools "would be able to start fresh" in developing new policies and procedures to best meet the needs of students.

The difference between charter and regular public schools was quickly apparent in Algiers when ACSA began hiring teachers. Instead of giving first priority to teachers who were at the school before Katrina and hiring them based on seniority, as the union contract would have dictated, the charter school group asked each teacher applicant to take a short test of math and writing skills. It screened out 50 of 250 applicants based on the test results alone.

Just as the charter school plan continued the pre-Katrina trend of decreasing board control of New Orleans public schools, the post-hurricane changes accelerated the trend of increasing state involvement and paved the way for many more charter schools. Gradually, the focus was less on the financial benefits of charters and more on their advantages in governance.

In early November Governor Blanco proposed an expansion of the state's authority to take over New Orleans schools. Instead of applying only to "failing" schools, the new powers would now pertain to all schools in districts "in academic crisis" that had performance scores below the state average. By state law, only Orleans Parish and one small rural district met this criterion. As a result, OPSB would be stripped of responsibility for 107 of the 128 public schools in the district.

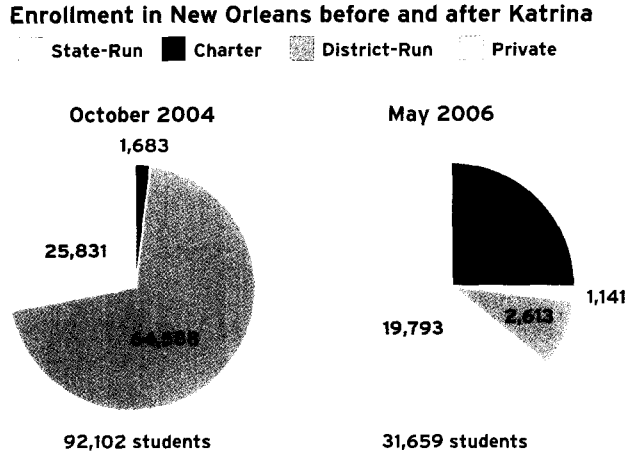
Anti-OPSB sentiment was running so high that the legislature quickly approved the plan by an overwhelming majority. The statehouse was even more eager to see the state take the reins in New Orleans, handily passing an alternative plan (that didn't become law) to take over all schools in the district. State board member Leslie Jacobs summarized the feelings of many when she described OPSB to the *Times-Picayune*: "There's no trust in the institution and no outcome of results that would make the institution worthy of the public's trust." Blanco signed her takeover plan into law on November 30, 2005.

Most of the newly chartered schools had below-average scores, but reapproval of their charters seemed very likely as universities and private foundations such as the Gates and Broad foundations, reluctant to get involved while the dysfunctional OPSB leadership remained in place, were now calling. According to Mayor Nagin, "They said, 'Look, you set up the right environment, we will fund, totally fund, brand-new schools for the city of New Orleans. But we don't want to go through what you've been through. All that struggle you've been having with that school board. We don't want to do that. We want to come in clean.'"

In January 2006, the state announced that it was seeking charter operators for the 38 Recovery District schools that were not too damaged to open in the 2006–07 school year. Twenty groups hoping to run new charter schools submitted 43 applications to a review committee, comprising a team from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers and local, state, and national representatives. The committee granted approval to 6 groups to run 10 schools.

Answering the Call (Figure 3)

In comparison to public school enrollment, the number of private school students remained relatively steady after Katrina, representing over 60 percent of total New Orleans enrollment in May 2006.



SOURCE: Louisiana Department of Education

Will It Last?

Since the board's charter-school decision and the new state takeover law, progress has been steady. The first public schools to open were 2 that had been chartered by the state board of education long before the hurricane and were in the relatively undamaged Uptown area of the city. The Orleans Parish School Board reopened its first school, Benjamin Franklin Elementary, with 146 students, also in Uptown, at the end of November 2005. On December 14, 5 Algiers charter schools opened their doors, "without a hitch," for more than 1,300 students.

And so it continued. By mid-January, 14 charter and 3 traditional public schools were educating again, serving about 9,000 students. By the spring, 25 schools were running, only

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4 of which, as mentioned, were operated by OPSB. The combined registration at the 18 charter schools and 7 traditional public schools was only 12,000 students, less than 20 percent of the pre-Katrina public school population. Alvarez & Marsal and state officials were estimating that by January 2007, New Orleans public schools would be serving 34,000 students—still barely half of the pre-Katrina enrollment.

To the extent that the post-Katrina developments are a natural continuation of earlier reforms, it seems likely that the charter school momentum will continue. But to the extent that charter schools came to dominate the New Orleans education scene only because of a natural disaster, it is reasonable to wonder whether the changes will stick. Will New Orleans want to continue as the U.S. city with the highest concentration of charter school students?

The federal government seems to hope so. In June of 2006, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings came to Louisiana to announce the awarding of $24 million to create more charters. The grant, reported the *New York Times*, "is likely to cement the role of New Orleans ... as the nation's preeminent laboratory for the widespread use of charter schools."

All schools will have considerable autonomy—including control over staffing, the authority to set their own budgets, and the freedom to offer extended school days or longer school years—but will be held accountable for results, and funds will follow students as they choose the schools that best meet their needs.

Another important factor on the side of charter school advocates is the greatly diminished power of the teachers union, which had often been an obstacle in earlier reform efforts. When the state legislature swept 107 schools into the expanded Recovery School District, it nullified the collective bargaining agreement between the Orleans Parish School Board and the union at those schools. Where it once had 4,700 members paying $600 in dues each year, the union now has only 300 members. The only schools with unionized teachers are the 4 schools operated by OPSB.

For those who want to preserve the new structure of New Orleans education, the rebuilding plan developed by the education committee of Mayor Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back Commission is also promising. The education committee was chaired by Dr. Scott Cowen, the president of Tulane University, who was assisted by an "education Dream Team" of national experts and local stakeholders. More than 1,500 students, parents, teachers, and community members, representing every school open prior to Katrina, offered input. In addition, the committee interviewed more than 40 education experts and studied successful districts around the country. Contributors to the final plan included representatives from the New Orleans Public Schools, state and local government, Louisiana universities, the U.S. Department of Education, the Broad Foundation, the Gates Foundation, the Council of the Great City Schools, IBM, Teach For America, the American Federation of Teachers, New Orleans nonprofits, and the Philadelphia, Norfolk (VA), and Oakland public school districts.

According to the plan's "educational network model," the school system would include a mix of charter, contract, and system-run schools, organized in small "networks" of similar schools. The Algiers Charter School Association, for example, could be one network within the larger school system.

All schools will have considerable autonomy—including control over staffing, the authority to set their own budgets, and the freedom to offer extended school days or longer school years—but will be held accountable for results, and funds will follow students as they choose the schools that best meet their needs. A network manager will provide support and accountability for each network of schools. A "lean" district office will focus on policymaking instead of top-down operational decisions, including a small "strategy group" that will set learning standards and ensure the equitable allocation of resources, but will not mandate teaching methods or control school spending. The other major component of the district organization will be a new central support-services office that will provide optional assistance to help schools obtain services such as food preparation and trans-

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Melvin Patterson listens to a lesson during seventh grade class at Samuel J. Green Charter School in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina has given New Orleans' chronically underperforming school system a fresh start.

portation. One superintendent will direct the network managers, strategy group, and services office and report to the school board, whose role will be oversight, not execution.

The plan explicitly rejects an all-charter-school system, but preserves many of the advantages of such a system, such as flexibility and decentralization. The plan also provides enough structure and support to help school leaders be successful without impinging on their autonomy. In fact, it seems that, within this framework, even the system-run schools will be indistinguishable from charter schools.

Significantly, the school board, often a tough sell on reform plans, has endorsed the Bring New Orleans Back Committee's educational network model. The state education department will ultimately determine what reforms are implemented, which signifies a major change in governance structure. But since state officials participated in the committee's planning process and the proposals fit with the state's general vision for New Orleans education, it seems likely that the final plan will resemble the committee's plan.

To be sure, it's just a plan, and large school districts are certainly famous for their ability to churn out weighty reports that go nowhere. But contrasting the New Orleans outline with another high-profile school plan released around the same time—D.C. superintendent Clifford Janey's "master education plan"—it seems that New Orleans is considerably more serious about overhauling school structure than Washington. Where the D.C. document is a 120-page hodgepodge, the New Orleans education blueprint is only 30 pages long, offering an ambitious, completely new vision for transforming the way education is delivered. New Orleans seems determined to preserve the reforms brought on by Katrina. The question is whether it can sustain the innovative momentum in the face of old habits—and new storms.

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Home Is Where the Heart Is

Can Cory Booker Save Newark's Schools?

It's April 9 and the Mediterranean Manor is rocking. As a large bus outside the downtown Newark reception hall cranks out B-list disco hits, hundreds of low rollers coming to the $50-a-plate Cory Booker fundraiser inch through a maze of velvet rope to sign in and pass before a pair of unidentified "consultants" standing at the door with a television camera. When asked by the campaign, "Who are you guys?" they just answer, "Security."

Inside, scores of waiters and busboys are setting up the buffets of macaroni salad, barbecued chicken, yellow rice, and other delectables. Within an hour the place is jammed well beyond capacity with supporters of Booker's mayoral bid lucklessly searching for open seats. Tables of elderly black matrons in their Sunday finest buzz with neighborhood gossip, while just a few feet away union reps pass the inexpensive red wine to their wives, and elsewhere unreserved

PHOTOS / WWW.CORYBOOKER.COM

BY DAVID SKINNER

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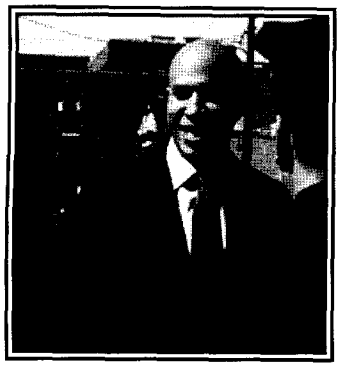
tables of strangers make nice with college students, entrepreneurs, government workers—white, black, and Hispanic—all bonding over their common hopes for the city.

It seems more like a wedding banquet than a fundraiser, especially since the event will actually lose money. But this is Newark, New Jersey, once called "The Worst American City," a city that has lost 36 percent of its population since 1930 (from 442,000 to 280,000) and is now more than half black and nearly 40 percent poor. It's a city, reported the *New York Times*, where "budgeting is a Rube Goldberg morass with a deficit looming," and where the school system, the state's largest, with 43,000 students, was so bad that it was taken over by the state more than a decade ago. Today the schools are still a mess, with 70 percent of 11th graders and 65 percent of 8th graders unable to pass the state's math tests. This is the Newark that Booker says needs more policing, more comprehensive child-welfare policies, school vouchers, and more charter schools.



Born in a New Jersey suburb, Booker was a star student at Northern Valley Regional High School in Old Tappan and a high-school All-American football player, known for being not the most gifted athlete but the most determined, one who never choked under pressure.

Supporting charters was a relatively safe bet. Although the number of charters in New Jersey was declining at the end of the 1990s, due in part to the state takeover, the number in Newark was growing, to 10. In fact, according to a 2003 Rutgers University report, "Newark's charter movement has flourished." Today, 12 of the state's 55 charter schools are in Newark.

Booker's support for vouchers was not so assured. Indeed, he now says that vouchers are not a key part of his education plan. Still, he has not ruled them out. "My determination is to reform the public school system," said candidate Booker, who was opposed by the state's powerful teachers union, with 192,272 members, in part because of his support of vouchers. For many of the same reasons, state senator and mayoral opponent Ronald Rice called Booker a proxy for "ultra-white, ultra-conservative" outsiders.

Proxy or not, Booker defeated Rice and two other candidates by a healthy margin. And he now has the opportunity—some might call it the unenviable task—of effecting education overhaul in one of America's most troubled and beleaguered cities. Can he succeed?

A Silver-Spoon Childhood

Many people thought that Cory Booker was too good to be true—especially for Newark. Booker pieced together an unusual but winning coalition of high society—Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, publisher David Bradley, and the Heinz family among them—and reform-minded Newarkers like those who turned out at the Mediterranean Manor with their $50 and, after listening to a brief stump speech, rushed to the dance floor to do the electric slide.

Until now, Cory Booker was famous for being famous. A one-term Newark city councilman who made an impressive but finally unsuccessful bid for mayor in 2002, he nevertheless had the unmistakable air and bearing of someone ready for the big time. Friends are convinced he will be the first black president of the United States. It's characteristic of his well-publicized ascent through life that his one major political race—the 2002 attempt to be mayor—became the subject of an Oscar-nominated documentary, *Street Fight*, directed by Marshall Curry. To persuade Booker to cooperate with the film project, Curry reportedly asked him, "What would it have been like if someone had filmed Bill Clinton's first campaign?"

Actually, Cory Booker probably had it much easier than Clinton, who was raised by his waitress mother after her husband

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died in a car accident. Booker's parents were upper-class executives who, though they were civil rights activists, spent their careers working for IBM and looking after their two sons. Born in a New Jersey suburb, Booker was a star student at Northern Valley Regional High School in Old Tappan and a high-school All-American football player, known for being not the most gifted athlete but the most determined, one who never choked under pressure. He went to Stanford on a football scholarship and there became class president before winning a Rhodes scholarship to attend Oxford. An overachiever with what would seem to be a genuine heart of gold, he then enrolled in law school at Yale before moving to Newark in 1996 to become an advocate for housing for the poor.

Getting Gritty

As Booker tells the story, the inspiration to become a leader in Newark came the day he knocked on the door of Virginia Jones, head of the tenants' association at Brick Towers, one of the city's worst housing projects. Booker, then a tenants' rights lawyer for the Urban Justice Center in New York City, introduced himself and said he wanted to help. She told him to follow her. They went outside, to the street, and there Jones demanded to know what the young lawyer saw around him. Drug dealers, a crack house, rundown projects, responded Booker.

"Well, you can't help me," she said and started to walk away. Booker caught up with her and demanded an explanation.

As Booker would tell the story at the 2005 annual summit of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), a nonprofit that supports public school alternatives, Jones then said, "Boy, you need to learn something. The world you see outside of you is a reflection of what you have inside of you. If you're one of those people who see problems, darkness, and despair, that's all there's ever going to be. But if you're one of those people who see hope, opportunity, love, and even the face of God, then you can help me."

Booker was so inspired by Jones that he moved in to Brick Towers determined to run for city council. His innate political gifts were obvious as he defeated a 16-year incumbent and, on taking office, refused the standing perk of a city car to drive him to council meetings. He also opposed generous pay raises for council members as well as the mayor. In 1998, he went on a hunger strike and lived in a tent outside the Garden Spires housing complex to draw attention to the flagrant open-air drug trade in the projects. He was the most visible of a handful of young Turks who dared to criticize Mayor Sharpe James and the city's system of financial cronyism.

A Call to Vouchers

Though Mayor James called him "a grandstander," Booker proved to be that and more when he announced his support for school vouchers in 2001. Complaining about the shocking absence of fiscal accountability in Newark's well-funded but ill-managed school system, Booker told a Manhattan Institute audience that private and charter schools in Newark often spent half as much per pupil as traditional public schools, but were achieving much greater results.

Vouchers, Booker argued, were a matter of civic empowerment. "Public education is the use of public dollars to educate our children at the schools that are best equipped to do so—public schools, magnet schools, charter schools, Baptist schools, Jewish schools, or other innovations in education. That is where public dollars should go." His one major caveat: vouchers can't be used as an excuse to pull funding from the public school system. Booker has since become associated with several prominent school-choice organizations, including the Newark-based E3 (Education Excellence for Everyone), as well as Clint Bolick's Alliance for School Choice and the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

Howard Fuller, the national board chair of BAEO, says he met Booker some seven years ago when he gave a talk at the North Star Academy charter school in Newark. (Booker is also on North Star's board of trustees.) Fuller says Booker's support of vouchers was highly significant to the school choice movement. "He's like a true Democrat, a young black Democrat who says, 'I'm a Democrat but I believe that vouchers and other forms of parental choice are very important for trying to make a difference for low-income parents of children who are not being well served by the current system.' The fact that he had the courage to do that meant a lot."

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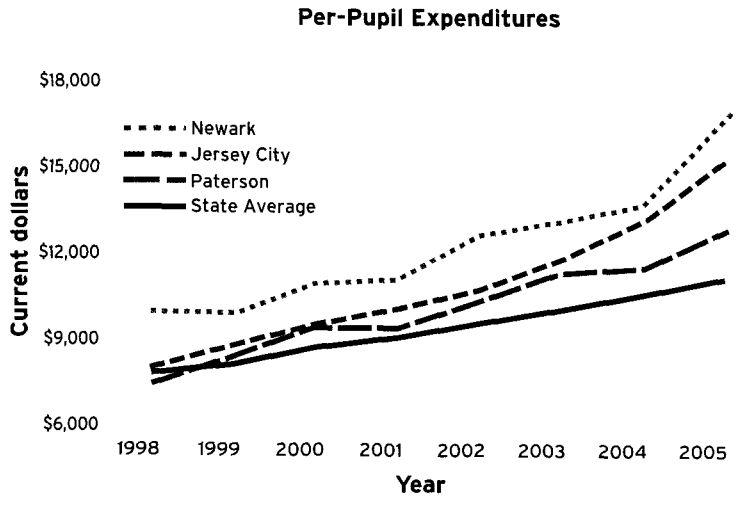
A Pretty Penny ... (Figure 1)

Newark continues to spend more per-pupil than both the New Jersey state average and other large urban school districts in New Jersey.



Note: Per-pupil expenditures are based on New Jersey's "Total Comparable Cost Per-Pupil."
SOURCE: New Jersey Department of Education

Taking on the Mayor

Controversial as it was, in Newark Booker's support for vouchers was not even a close second to the notoriety he invited by challenging four-term mayor James, a politician whose administration was equal parts charisma and corruption.

That mayoral battle showed America how the new politics of identity could be very much like the blood prejudices of old. Calling Booker a "carpetbagger," James systematically tried to strip Booker of his identity, questioning his blackness by calling him white, his Christianity by calling him Jewish, and his political affiliations by calling the Democratic Booker a Republican. And as if that weren't enough, the mayor accused his black challenger of being a tool of the Ku Klux Klan. As one Capitol Hill veteran said after watching the documentary about the battle, "*Street Fight*?! That's putting it mildly!" The James campaign succeeded in drowning out Booker's idealistic vision for the city and James earned a fifth term. The margin, however, 3,500 votes out of more than 50,000 cast, was slim enough to give James some doubts about the durability of his reign.

Two years later, about to turn 35, no longer on the city council but still living in the projects, Booker was taking a walk with his father near his tenement apartment when something happened that in almost any other city would have landed him on the front page of the local paper. As he told the story in a 2004 speech, he heard gunshots ring out and "saw a sea of kids running toward me." He raced past the children in the direction of the gunshots just in time to see a young man stumbling off a set of stairs in a housing project. "I caught him from behind, laid him down, and looked onto his chest. And blood was just cascading and soaking his T-shirt." Booker put his hands to the boy's bloody chest and tried to speak as the youth coughed and gasped. "I felt for his pulse, his eyes started rolling back. His pulse got weaker and weaker. I tried to cover the holes in his chest. And eventually there was nothing."

Had this happened just a few miles away, in Manhattan, one could expect a photograph of the shocked politician, his shirt bloodied, on the cover of the *New York Post*. But in Newark, the *Star-Ledger* published a short article in the next day's edition on page 21. This was Newark.

But was this Cory Booker? A vegetarian teetotaler, an avid self-improver who exercises regularly and seems to read everything? His guilty pleasure, he once told the *New York Times*, is watching *Star Trek*. While the African American community struggles to come to terms with its own overachievers, he is the epitome of "acting white."

Booker is also preternaturally polished. It is easy to picture him, with his athletic build and clean-shaven head, cast in bronze. His speaking style is a throwback to a golden-tongued politics of old. "You have to have poetry and prose," he says. "The prose is management, competence, doing the job of public administration. The poetry is inspiration, calling on people to achieve more, to love more, to be more."

"He Smells Like the Future"

Will this be Booker's formula for education reform in Newark? Successful leadership, he believes, depends on internal ideals so powerful that they make the leader see the world not as it is, but as he wishes it were.

Booker speaks extensively of what he calls "crazy love," the "unreasonable, irrational, impractical love that sustained African Americans through slavery, inequality, and the civil rights movement." And listening to his speeches, one can identify with the little girl shown in *Street Fight* who, after meeting Booker, acts as if she's just encountered a movie star. She smells her hand, which he has just shaken, and says, "He smells like the future." Indeed, it is an understatement to say that Cory Booker excels at the poetry part of politics.

But it will take more than poetry to fix Newark's schools. The district is a classic example of well-funded failure. According to the New Jersey D.O.E., the city's public school

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district spent almost $17,000 per pupil in 2005, while the rest of the state spent about than $11,000 (see Figure 1). And it still lagged far behind the state's average academic outcomes. Fifty-three percent of Newark's 4th graders are proficient in English and 43 percent are proficient in math, while the state boasts proficiency percentages of 78 and 68, respectively. Newark's 8th graders do even worse (see Figure 2).

In 2005, more than 60 percent of 11th graders failed the state math test. In 2003, 28 percent of seniors failed to graduate, while 42 percent graduated with only an alternative diploma. And all this is *after* being under state control for ten years. Back then, in 1995, Newark schools ranked second among 30 special-needs districts in teacher pay, and second to last in the percentage of 11th graders passing the high-school proficiency test. Questionable hiring practices were prevalent, and it was discovered in 1993, during an external review by a team appointed by the state commissioner of education, that the district was siphoning off "a significant portion of its resources into noninstructional personnel to provide employment to many Newark citizens."

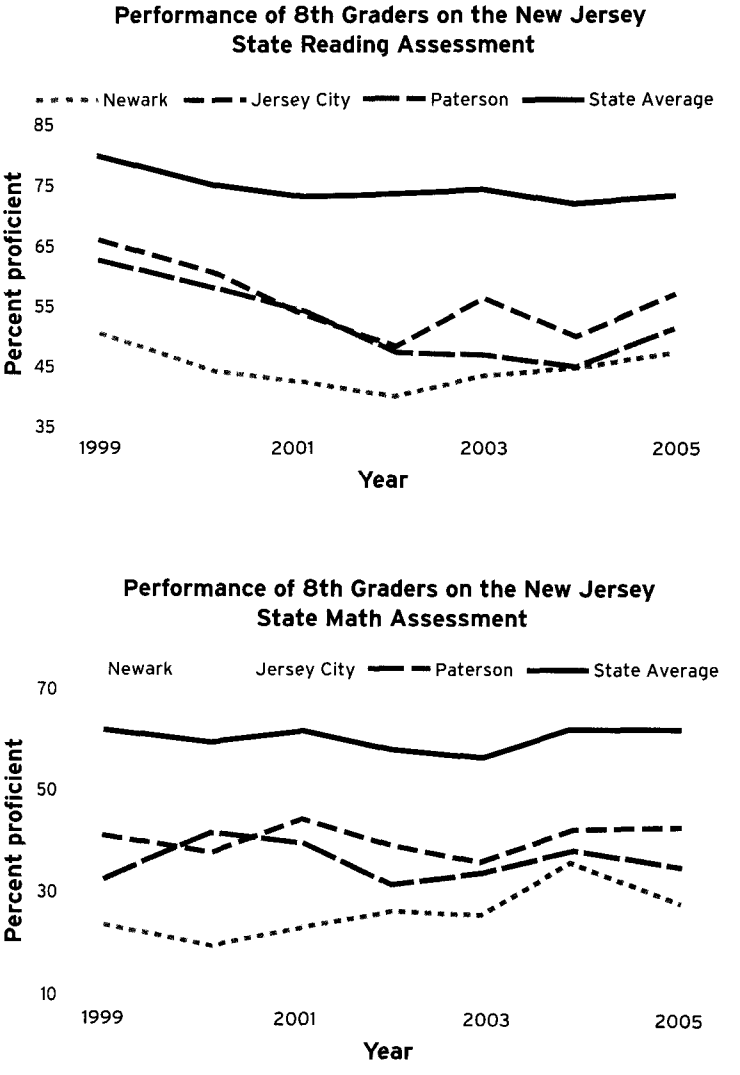
The state's final comprehensive study of the district leading up to takeover found that it had been "at best flagrantly delinquent or at worst deceptive in discharging its responsibilities to its students." School buildings were "filthy, unsafe, and in disrepair." Public transportation was "hazardous." Schools lacked decent food service and "sufficient, appropriate instructional materials." Wilbur Rich, who studied Newark for his book *Black Mayors and School Politics*, called it "the strangest system I ever investigated." Some schools lacked even chalk, while all the money went to teachers' salaries and the school board operated as "a patronage-dispensing system."

According to the state, the political system running the show smacked of corruption and self-dealing. "Uncovered in the district were conflicts of interest, falsification of reports, willful violation of New Jersey's election and bidding laws, misused and mismanaged federal, local, and state monies, mismanaged personnel matters, loose control over cash...."

The view of the schools from inside the classrooms was just as troubling. In her book *Ghetto Schooling*, Jean Anyon, former chairperson of the education department at Rutgers University–Newark, describes administrators at a typical school in 1992 and 1993 as buck-passing incompetents and teachers as tough and resentful of outsiders (especially white ones) looking to tell them how to do their jobs. Anyon's analysis went far beyond her own impressionistic reporting, but no part of her sociocultural analysis spoke as loudly as the teachers she quoted, one telling a student her breath "smells like dog [expletive],"

... For Dismal Results (Figure 2)

Newark students score poorly on the state assessments compared to the other large districts, and markedly so when compared with the state average.



SOURCE: New Jersey Department of Education

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another telling a student her mother was "a [expletive]," and one 5th-grade teacher saying to his class, "If I had a gun, I'd kill you. You're all hoodlums." To repeat: this was a typical Newark school.

A Practical Politician to the Rescue?

In an interview with *Education Next* during the closing weeks of the campaign, Booker said he wanted to improve relations between the mayor's office and the state-appointed superintendent when he became the city's chief executive. But he also said that his first priority would be to make the schools safe, an uncontroversial but essential promise. Citing a newspaper article that described children being afraid to stay for afterschool programs, Booker says, "We're going to come in immediately and secure all of our school zones and put in whatever necessary personnel in and around our schools to protect [children as they travel] to and from school."

He also hopes to expand tutoring and afterschool programs and create more "linkages" between students and potential employers. Health, well-being, nutrition, and early child development are other areas where he sees possibilities for mayoral leadership. "We want to make sure that every child, by the time they're six years old, arrives in school healthy and ready to learn."

Booker says he will also pursue mayoral control of the school system after the state returns control of the schools to Newark in 2007. And with a new slate of Booker-friendly members elected to the city council—"Team Booker" won all nine seats—he will have a good chance of getting it. He is critical of "school boards that are elected with a fraction of the vote in voter turnout" and "special-interest groups" that lack a "unifying vision" to reform the system. "To really leverage change," says Booker, it is necessary to "centralize control under one person." This is something Anyon and other local education experts oppose, so it will be interesting to watch the new mayor maneuver his way through this minefield.

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An Agenda for Reform

The question of vouchers will also surely resurface, but it will not be one of Booker's top priorities. Candidate Booker created the Institute for Urban Excellence, a nonprofit whose sole mission has been to develop a report of best urban practices to guide policy in post–Sharpe James Newark. And it has been soliciting advice from education researchers on a reform package. In March, Bo Kemp, director of the institute, met with Alan Sadovnik, the current head of the education department at Rutgers–Newark, and others from the Institute on Education Law and Policy, also at Rutgers–Newark. Says Sadovnik: "We advised caution with regard to the issue of vouchers. It is not in our view the primary or most important thing the new mayor should do in Newark." Vouchers may even "detract" from plans to improve the public schools, says Sadovnik, given the limited capacity of private and Catholic schools in the city.

Did Booker listen? During a candidates' debate in April he seemed to, saying that vouchers had nothing to do with his education plan for Newark. Yet, when asked a week earlier if he had experienced a change of heart on vouchers, Booker denied it. He supports, he says, "any kind of choice programs that are targeted toward poor children who are trapped in failing schools."

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He called it "morally wrong" for "the connected, the elected, the privileged," who send their kids to private schools, "not to favor a system that creates options for parents that are now being enjoyed by those privileged elites in urban communities around our nation."

One reason for the ambiguity may be that Booker's position on vouchers has always been a practical one. "I don't think he has any orthodox views either way," says Howard Fuller of BAEO. "He's not an ideologue on vouchers. He sees that as something that may be useful, but he sees other things. To me, what Cory would probably do as mayor is figure out what would work and what is politically possible to try to make a difference for the children in his city. And I personally would not expect him or want him to do anything but what he thinks is right and would make a difference."

In any case, says Paul Hill, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, it takes more than a few vouchers or mayoral control to turn around a failing school system. "The hard part," says Hill, "is finding a way to dispossess" all the groups, from teacher unions to local churches to political clubs, that have "embedded relationships" in the school system. "When mayors take over schools, they think they can just manage the same system."

But what they need to do is change the system itself, by closing schools, opening new ones, and finding ways to bring in new teachers to get around the "generations of bad hires" that plague failing schools. "As somebody who believes in school choice and vouchers," says Hill, "I think believing in them in a simple-minded way is worse than being against them." Hill points to the Expect Success program in the Oakland, California, public schools as a "tremendous example" of what might be done in Newark if Mayor Booker pursues fundamental reform of the school system.

Wilbur Rich seconds this opinion, saying the "entrenched relationships" of the system's employees will become the biggest stumbling block for a mayor bent on reinventing the system. Rich says he likes Booker, a lot even, but that "this guy is so smooth and so optimistic, almost to the point of being naive."

Booker doesn't seem to mind that kind of criticism. "Another big thing for us is helping charter schools," he says, noting that the "biggest impediment to charter school expansion in Newark is often having the facilities to do so." He wants the city to be in partnership with charter schools, helping them find facilities in order to build on the success of existing Newark charter schools like the Knowledge Is Power Program and North Star academies.

Booker says he will also focus on improving financial accountability to make sure "the money being spent is actually getting to the classroom and empowering young people as opposed to being sucked up by bureaucracies." He wants the schools to do more to protect students from the culture of failure, which, he says, may involve extending the school day and implementing weekend and summer programs.

Booker as a "Post-Racial" Leader

In the end, Cory Booker may not be as liberal as some educators in Newark hope, nor as conservative as others fear. He is an explicitly religious, anti-bureaucracy politician who, when asked for his position on affirmative action, says, "there is still a place for it." He praises the Supreme Court's decision upholding the University of Michigan's right to evaluate "the totality of an application" and consider a student applicant's race as "a valuable informative tool." If affirmative action is a racial identity litmus test, Booker passes.

But now that he is mayor, he begins the arduous task of making his wish list of education reforms a reality. Should he have even moderate success, it seems likely he will be in line to become a national figure representing the new generation of black leadership in America, a leadership that does not abandon race matters altogether, but seems less angry than previous generations and more in tune with the America of Tiger Woods, Barack Obama, and Oprah Winfrey.

Howard Fuller, when asked what it might mean for Booker to replace a man like Sharpe James, whom Booker has called "a race-based mayor," says that "Cory understands how race works in America, but he also understands the class dimension to the problems in a city like Newark. So the solutions can't be solely based on race. There are other dimensions to the problems that impact poor black people more than just race. And I don't think Cory's going to be the kind of person who's going to shy away from dealing with things that are racial. But at the same time he's not going to play the race card every time something happens, whether race is the basis for it or not."

A "post-racial" black leader, an inspirational figure, a reforming, anti-corruption mayor? Cory Booker may prove to be all these. He will have to be, as he tries to save the children of Newark from ending up like the teenager who died in his arms. Or he may not. A few of his admirers worry that upon taking office he will "go native" in this city of the political machine. One of Booker's ward captains expresses a version of this concern when she says her greatest hope for Mayor Booker is that he remain "unbought and unbossed."

When asked if he's already an insider, Booker laughs and says, "The short answer is no." He insists that he won this election by convincing Sharpe James that he could not prevail again. Only then did the endorsements roll in, with the unions, developers, and everyone else around town trying to get in on the act. But he welcomes the newcomers, and says, "We're leveraging that support for our agenda of reform and not for any agendas that are contrary to that."

David Skinner is an assistant managing editor at the Weekly Standard *and editor of* Doublethink *magazine.*

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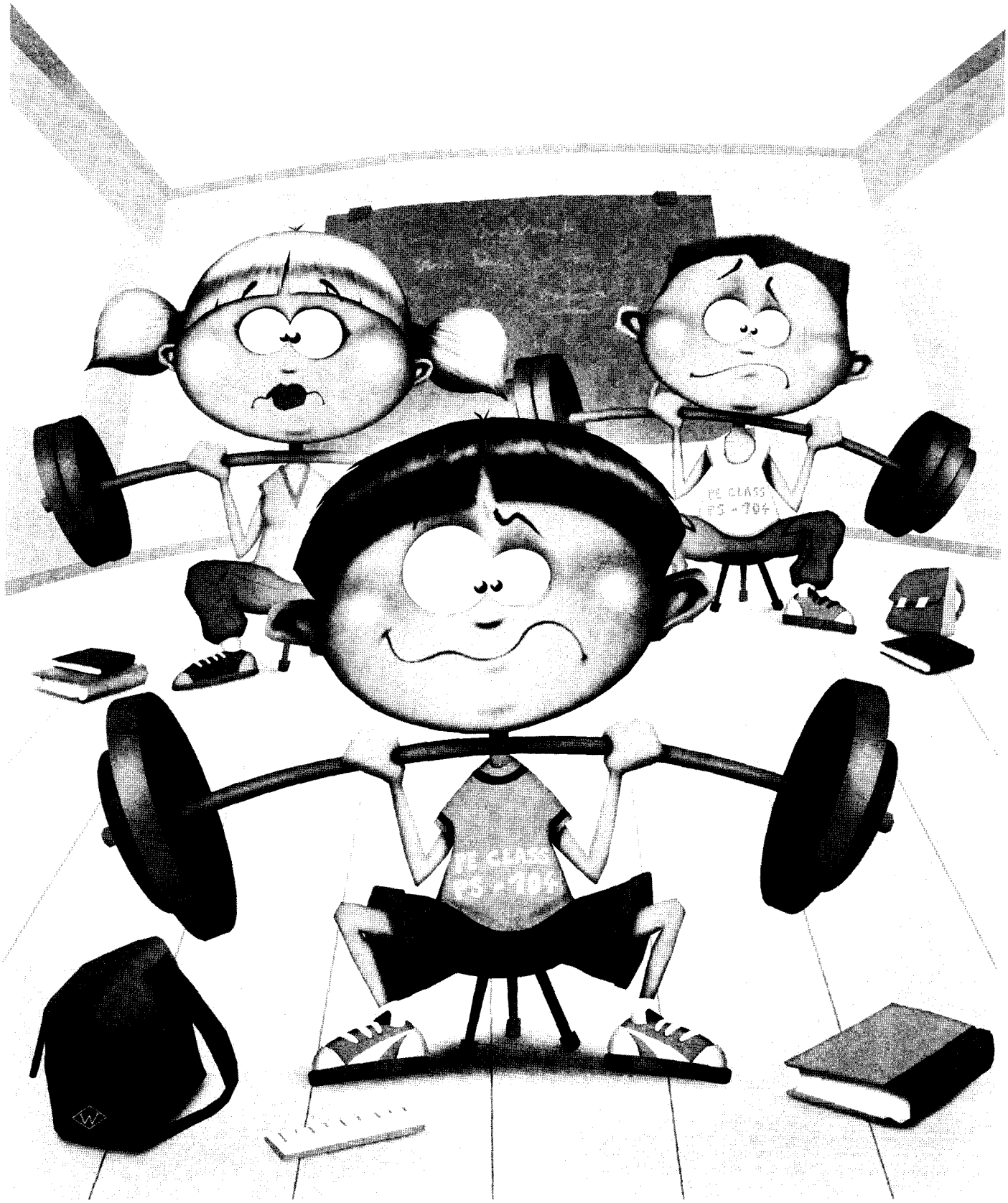

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Don't Sweat It

How some schools do—and don't do—PE

BY BOB CULLEN

Overweight children would not be the first thing a visitor to Grafton, West Virginia, would think of when seeing the small farms that cling to steep hillsides and cultivate the bottomland along the Tygart River as one drives into town. Like most of the state, the landscape around this village of 5,200, the county seat of Taylor County, just 20 miles south of Morgantown, nods to pastoral enterprise, suggesting a place where citizens might be eating healthy foods, hiking, working farms and mines—staying fit.

Unfortunately, this isn't so.

"When the kids finish school, they take the bus home," says Rod Auvil, a physical education (PE) teacher at Taylor County Middle School in Grafton. "They let themselves in the house because both their parents work. They play video games. They watch TV. They eat. It's a very sedentary lifestyle."

And it shows. In a survey done between 1999 and 2005 by the Institute of Medicine, a branch of the National Academy of Science, 46 percent of West Virginia's 5th graders were found to be either obese or overweight. According to West Virginia's Bureau of Public Health, more than a third of the state's residents are obese and many more are overweight. The problem worries organizations like Mountain State Blue Cross, which will have to pay for the diabetes and heart problems associated with obesity. And it bothers the state government, which has decreed a doubling of PE class hours for middle-school students, who currently get one exercise period a day for nine weeks out of an entire school year.

Is that enough? Will it make a difference?

Though weight, and that includes overweight, is the result of a complex set of interactions between an individual's genes, behavior, and the environment, at its simplest, as a recent

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National Institutes of Health report states, our size is the result of "a balance between energy intake and energy expenditures." Eating and exercise. Here we discuss the second of these two fundamentals: energy expenditures and what our schools are doing to affect the equation. (For an analysis of schools' role in energy intake, see "The School Lunch Lobby" and "What's for Lunch?" *features*, Summer 2005.)

America the Fat

West Virginia is not alone in its struggles with weight (see Figure 1)—or its decision to ratchet up PE requirements as a means of dealing with the problem. The United Health Foundation, a nonprofit organization that publishes an annual "health rankings" of states, says that the Mountain State is 48th in the nation in "prevalence of obesity" in the population (only Mississippi and Alabama are fatter), but its 27.7 percent obese population is only five points higher than the national average, which is 22.8 percent obese.

Across America, kids are not just chubby, but alarmingly fat. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that childhood obesity has doubled in the last two decades. About one in six children is seriously overweight. And, as in West Virginia, legislatures have taken notice, and have given schools the job of solving the problem (see "Not Your Father's PE," *research*, page 60). Last year 18 states passed new legislation on physical activity in schools. In both Maryland and Virginia, bills were introduced requiring schools to do body mass index screenings.

Will schools be able to handle their new assignment of downsizing the American child?

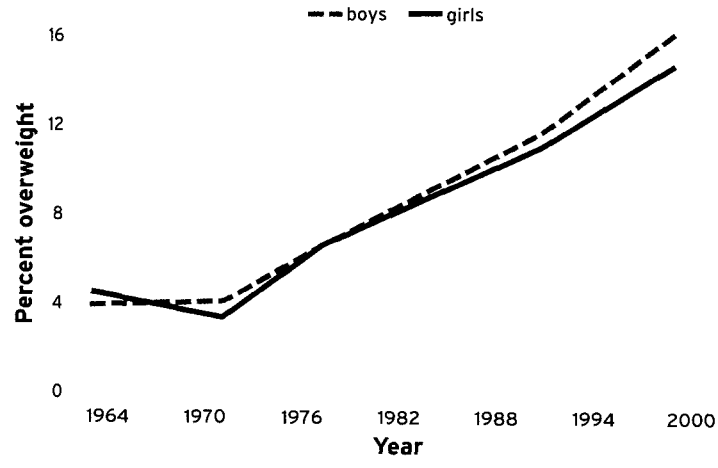
"A waste of time," says one physical education teacher I spoke to, commenting on PE practices. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the current state of affairs could be the result of some bad habits in recent years, as daily participation in high-school physical education classes dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 28 percent in 2003. Currently, only one state, Illinois, requires daily PE for grades K-12. And this lackluster—lazy?—attitude about physical exercise persists despite the evidence that, as the NCSL reports, "Thirty minutes of active physical activity during the school day can help control weight, build healthy bones, muscles, and joints, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, enhance feelings of well-being, and may even improve academic performance."

Rod Auvil's school is one of several I visited to assess the likelihood that schools can help stem the obesity tide. Besides rural West Virginia, I observed PE in working-class Chesapeake, Maryland, and at Yorktown High in suburban Arlington, Virginia, which boasts graduates such as the late senator Paul Wellstone, astronaut David Brown, and television journalist Katie Couric. I also visited a school in Fairfax, Virginia, whose demographic diversity makes it look like America itself. I saw a mix of rural and metropolitan, blue-collar and white-collar, rich and poor. I saw good PE and bad PE. And though we all know that rising childhood obesity stems from powerful social and cultural factors over which the schools have little or no control, I can also conclude, from what I observed at these schools, that PE classes as currently conducted are not particularly efficient burners of calories or builders of muscle.

All right! Everyone! Listen up! On your feet! Five laps! Or not …

The Plumpening (Figure 1)

Since the early 1960s, the percentage of overweight children ages 6 to 11 has almost quadrupled.



Note: According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), an "overweight" individual has a body mass index (BMI) at or above the 95th percentile of the CDC's sex-specific BMI growth chart. The point estimates on the graph are the result of surveys administered in five time periods: 1963-65, 1971-74, 1976-80, 1988-94, and 1999-2000.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "Health, United States, 2003"

Taylor Middle School

Let's Dance

On a recent morning in the gym at Taylor Middle School in Grafton, West Virginia, where more than half the kids qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, we see what can happen when technology meets childhood obesity. As teacher Auvil reviews his lesson plan for 5th-grade PE, he notes how it differs from the plans he devised when he started teaching 23 years ago. Then, dodgeball ruled. Now, computers do.

Auvil engages in something that might be called co-opting the enemy. Before his students arrive in the gym, he retrieves

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two specimens of exercise enemy number one, the television set, from an equipment storage room. The TVs are mounted on rolling carts, and he trundles them into position on two sides of the gym. He inserts examples of "enemy number two," the video game, into devices underneath the television sets.

A school bell rings.

Children start to trickle in, heading for the locker room to change into gym clothes. (Unlike many public schools, Taylor does not provide exercise uniforms.) Several children notice the TVs. "Are we going to dance today?" a girl asks. Auvil smiles and nods. "Yeah!" the girl exclaims.

A bespectacled kid in a T-shirt bearing the likeness of TV wrestler Rob Van Dam ("Mr. Monday Night") walks up to Auvil and asks to be excused from class. He rolls up his shirt and displays a red welt on a tummy already drooping over his waistband. "I got frostbite," he says. "From a CO_2 cartridge." Auvil explains that CO_2 is used in firing paintball guns, which, for modern Taylor County kids, is the equivalent of playing pickup basketball at the corner courts, but without the sweat. Auvil tells the boy he can exercise despite his trauma.

Ten minutes into class, 38 children have changed into their exercise clothes and are lining up on the gym floor. Auvil first runs his charges through seven minutes of traditional PE class drills: the kids stretch, jog, crab-walk, skip, and jump. They take a water break. Then it is time for "Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)," the latest effort to harness technology to the cause of fitness, and now part of a pilot program in 20 West Virginia middle schools.

Auvil places six brightly colored plastic pads on the floor and connects them, via cables, to the TVs. Each pad is about the size of a hopscotch box and has an array of colorful arrows and circles printed on it, with pressure sensors underneath. The television screens come to life, revealing a boy standing on a pad just like the Taylor kids have. Perky pop music blares. The character on the screen moves his feet from one spot on his pad to another, in time with the beat. In front of the monitors, six kids on pads—that's all the pilot program administrators gave Taylor—bob and step. The closer the Taylor kids come to matching the screen boy's moves, the higher their scores, which are registered on the screen for all to see. The remaining kids, most of the class, stand in line behind the pads, watching.

The idea of Dance Dance Revolution, an adaptation of a Japanese arcade game, is that if you want to get a generation that is already hooked on video games to start moving, you have to use the technology that they're hooked on. To a degree, it seems to be working. The kids on the pads have the glazed stares of committed video gamers as they move back and forth. "They'd do it all day if I let them," Auvil says.

But it is apparent that the video game will probably fall short of revolutionizing the fitness of kids in Taylor County. DDR is light exercise, at best. None of the kids on the pads breaks a sweat. And at any given moment 32 of 38 kids are just watching. On average, a child in Auvil's class gets six to ten minutes of light exercise from DDR before the bell rings.

Though Auvil thinks that trying DDR is better than doing nothing, it seems unlikely that Dance Dance Revolution will have much of an impact on childhood obesity, at least not in Grafton, West Virginia.

Chesapeake High

Back to Basics—Sort of

The title of the basic physical education class at Chesapeake High School in Pasadena, Maryland, at least acknowledges the importance of what happens after the course is over. It's called "Fitness for Life," and PE instructor Walter R. "Skip" Lee is dedicated to that goal. But he often feels a bit like a preacher trying to get his flock into Sunday school on a day when the circus is in town.

PE instructor Walter R. "Skip" Lee is dedicated to the goal of fitness. But he often feels a bit like a preacher trying to get his flock into Sunday school on a day when the circus is in town.

At 7:50 on a recent morning, the roughly 25 students in his class are filing into the gym, wearing uniform blue shorts and gray T-shirts. High-school students in Anne Arundel County must take more PE than the state of Maryland requires. Maryland, which ranks 22nd on the nation's obesity scale with 21.9 percent of its population severely overweight, requires a half-credit, or roughly a quarter of a daily class, of its high-school students. Anne Arundel County requires a full semester of PE, which is about 90 classes' worth in three months. Most Chesapeake students take "Fitness for Life" in 9th grade.

Lee begins the class by directing his students to take a five-minute warm-up jog around the perimeter of the gym. Fitness for Life is a standardized PE curriculum used by all the high schools in the county. It is a combination of calisthenics and

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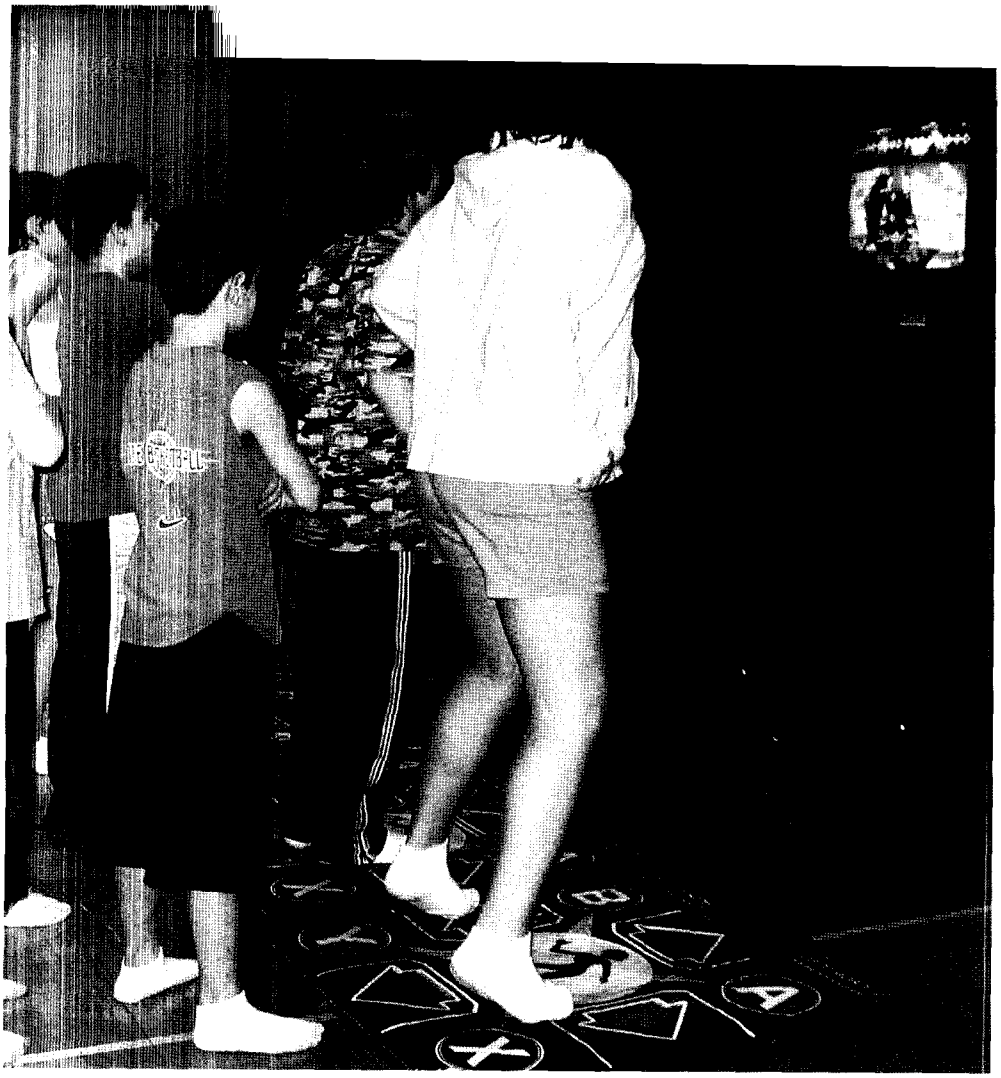

PHOTO / BOB CULLEN

On average, a child gets six to ten minutes of light exercise from Dance Dance Revolution before the bell rings.

games, with an emphasis on explaining to kids how the exercises and activities burn calories and contribute to a healthy life. Lee's class is mixed by race, by gender, by weight—and by enthusiasm. Some kids look hulking. Some are still waiting for their growth spurts and don't top 90 pounds. Some bound around the gym at a good pace, some jog, some walk. After two or three laps, the cluster of walkers gets larger.

After five minutes, Lee blows a whistle and leads the class through four minutes of stretching. He would normally have moved to calisthenics, but this was a day for setting a benchmark for each student in the curl-up, a version of the abdominal crunch, which is a variation on the sit-up.

Lee then leads the students across a hall into the school's wrestling room. The teacher explains that he is going to turn on a boom box that will emit a recorded "up-down" cadence a total of 81 times, the number of curl-ups he wants his students to do. The kids form a circle on the floor and begin raising their upper bodies off the floor, touching their lower legs with their hands, lying prone again, then repeating the movement, all to the beat from the boom box, for two and a half minutes. Lee, carrying a clipboard, asks each student how many curl-ups he or she performed. More than half the class reported doing all 81.

"Fantastic, guys," says Lee, an enthusiastic teacher who looks for opportunities to be encouraging. He leads the class back across the hall and puts them through 20 minutes of an indoor game called speedball, akin to soccer. The class divides into three teams and each team splits time between playing and watching.

It is early in the semester, and the curl-up benchmark is one of several Lee is establishing for skills ranging from the mile run to pull-ups. He expects he will see significant improvement in the students' performances by the end of the semester. He usually does. But there are limits to what he can do, limits imposed primarily by the culture the kids re-enter when they leave class.

Lee introduces me to a slender, black-haired girl named Paige Gardener, who is 14. Last year, in middle school, she says, her beginning time for the mile run was 10:51. By the end of the semester it was down to 9:51. "I like doing physical things, improving," she says. But when I ask her how often she runs on her own, she says, "Maybe once a month." Paige works four days a week giving shampoos in a hair salon for $5.50 an hour. That cuts into the time she has for sports, and though she might like to try out for the soccer or track teams at Chesapeake, she doesn't feel she can.

That's part of what he is up against, Lee tells me after class is over. Pasadena, Maryland, is a suburb of modest houses and apartments about ten miles south of Baltimore. Not every family has the wherewithal to permit a child to spend her leisure time on exercise and sports. And many students opt for a part-time job to finance a car.

"Kids take the path of least resistance," says Lee. "The parents in this community don't, by and large, work out. They don't walk anywhere. The kids tend to end up like that, too. When a kid turns 16, he gets a job so he can get a car." And walk less often.

Lee sees two distinct categories of students at Chesapeake: the athletes—about a third of Chesapeake's 1,940 students participate on a varsity or junior varsity team—and the nonathletes. Lee, who is 41, feels the varsity athletes are just as fit as, if not fitter than, the athletes of his own high-school days. He has coached the track team for the past seven years, and in that time his athletes have broken 13 school records. But he works them hard—two hours a day, five days a week.

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But the nonathletes get much less daily exercise than their peers of two or three decades ago, and Lee sees the consequences in his classes. "Twenty years ago, to be considered fit, a 14-year-old boy was supposed to be able to do 11 pull-ups. Nowadays, I'd be happy to have one kid do that many." These days, he starts his classes out doing push-ups with their knees on the ground, rather than the "military" push-ups (only hands and toes on the ground) that were de rigueur for boys a generation ago. He expects to have all the class members doing military push-ups by the end of the semester.

Skip Lee is not sanguine about the future. He thinks that standards of fitness are dropping and that the state should require at least two courses of PE. "Fit kids," he says, "would do better in their academic classes." It's an argument for exercise as old as the ancient Greeks—or Thomas Jefferson, who in 1786, advised a future son-in-law, "If the body be feeble, the mind will not be strong—the sovereign invigorator of the body is exercise."

Yorktown High

Is PE a time waster?

The countervailing pressures against increasing the physical education requirements are strong and widespread, and in plain view at Yorktown High, in Arlington, Virginia, a school that prides itself on producing high achievers.

The student population at Yorktown is 69 percent white, 16 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian, and 7 percent African American, and only 17 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Its diversity is evident as Rebecca Bonzano's 10 a.m. PE class of freshmen and sophomores begins to assemble one recent morning. Not only is there an ethnic mix, there are also goths and prepsters, nerds and jocks, fat kids and thin ones. By 10:07, they emerge from their locker rooms in blue-and-gray uniforms. Bonzano takes attendance. At 10:10, the class begins a few minutes of warm-up jogging, back and forth along a floor that has been set up with six volleyball nets. Some students walk, chatting with friends.

At 10:15, the students sit down on the floor. Bonzano reads the standings after two weeks of volleyball competition. Students at Yorktown take a semester of PE and a semester of health in their first year. In the second year, they get three quarters of PE and a quarter of health. Each PE course consists of three-week units on different sports. Though physical exercise, known previously as gymnasium, has been a common part of American schooling since the 19th century, recreational games like basketball, flag or touch football, soccer, and softball were not introduced into the PE curriculum until the 1930s. The idea now is that if students learn sports, they will have a pleasant way to exercise after class and after graduation.

Bonzano opens a bag of volleyballs, and at 10:16, the games begin. The teams are co-ed, each game lasts about five minutes, and the level of play is spotty. There are few rallies, few spikes, few sets, no digs. At any given moment, 1 student is attempting to play the ball and 11 stand and watch.

At 10:44, a bell rings and the last volleyball game ends. In seconds, the students are in their locker rooms. They had been on the gym floor for 34 minutes. None had broken a sweat. By 10:50, the students are dressed and back on the floor, waiting for the bell at 10:53 that dismisses them.

Thomas Jefferson once advised a future son-in-law, "If the body be feeble, the mind will not be strong—the sovereign invigorator of the body is exercise."

"That was one of my most challenging classes," Bonzano says after the students have gone, meaning that these students aren't enthusiastic about being in physical education. "In some of the other classes, you have kids cheering, getting into it. They play hard."

Bonzano, in her 15th year of teaching, is unhappy with the role of PE at Yorktown. "In many respects it's a waste of time," she says. "I would have four years of PE and I'd have harder standards. You'd have to run a mile under a certain time, you'd have to do a certain number of curl-ups, and so on. As it is, we've watered down the fitness standards, and they're too easy. And the kids don't even have to meet them! We just pass them and promote them." She says that the old national fitness standards are not used anymore because they were too hard.

But Bonzano does not expect this situation to change, because it satisfies the desires of too many constituencies.

"We have parents who would like to cut PE further," she says. "They'd like more time for Advanced Placement academic classes. They're focused on their kids getting into the Ivy League, and they know those colleges don't care about PE grades."

Like their parents, she says, Yorktown students are focused on building a résumé that will look good to selective colleges. PE has no role in that.

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PHOTO / BOB CULLEN

To make a real dent in childhood obesity, the schools will probably have to hold those intense classes and afterschool programs five days a week.

Lanier Middle School

Picking Up the Pace

Perhaps the most a determined teacher can do in the current system is make students burn calories nearly all the time they're in PE class.

That's what Denise Moser does at Lanier Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, a school with a mix of ethnicities and income levels that mirrors that of the general population. Moser, who is 31, came to PE teaching by a nontraditional route. A certified personal trainer, she got into teaching on a provisional license. When she looked at the way most physical education classes were run, she saw one thing she thought she could improve immediately: "There was too much downtime," she says.

Moser has to adapt her personal training techniques to a class where she and another teacher handle as many as 80 students at a time. And on a recent Monday afternoon, that was what she and fellow teacher Meghan Doran do. The students come into class wearing gym shorts and T-shirts that read "Get Fit at Lanier" on the back. Moser has them walk and jog around the gym while she and Doran set up six rows of "stations." At one station there are elastic bands. At another there are homemade low platforms, constructed of wood, for step drills. Other stations have only the walls of the gym or the first row of bleachers. But there is a station for every student. No one waits in line in Moser's classes.

Within minutes, Moser and Doran have all 80 students at a station and exercise begins. For 40 seconds, one row of students might be required to do as many arm curls as possible with the elastic band. Then a whistle blows, and that group of students runs to the wooden platforms, where they do 40 seconds of step drills while another group takes its place with the bands. Some stations are simple calisthenics, push-ups, or squats with backs pressed to the gym wall.

Every seven minutes a round ends, and Doran and Moser demonstrate new drills to be performed at each station. The routine is familiar to the students, and with the exception of a brief water break, they are in motion from 2:15 to 2:46.

Boot Camp

But Moser is not done for the day. At 3 p.m., she greets about a dozen students for an afterschool activity called "Lanier Boot Camp." Once a week, she and fellow teacher Pam Clingenpeel give anyone who cares to show up a 45-minute workout that is the equivalent of a fitness class at a commercial gym. On this Monday, the boot camp students lift weights. They run hurdles. They do abdominal crunches and push-ups while balancing on exercise balls. The workout demands a high fitness level from Moser and Clingenpeel. The students, a self-selected group, seem to thrive on the activity. They are sweating but happy when the class ends. "I like PE, but this is more fun," says one student.

Denise Moser has founded a nonprofit organization, Functional Fitness for Kids, Inc., which she hopes will spread the free, afterschool boot-camp model to middle schools throughout the country. She believes that it's in the middle-school years, when children are first deemed old enough to go home after school and look after themselves, that habits of being sedentary and overeating begin. She thinks her program can help 5th and 6th graders form better habits.

Moser's example suggests that it is at least theoretically possible to give students the sort of calorie-burning, muscle-building workout that adults pay trainers to provide in commercial gyms. And Moser proves that it is possible to eliminate much of the downtime from the average PE class. But if school systems are to follow Lanier Middle School's example, they will have to find teachers fit and enthusiastic enough to lead Moser's sort of high-paced class, not to mention volunteers to run supplemental classes after school.

To make a real dent in childhood obesity, the schools will probably have to hold those intense classes and afterschool programs five days a week. If they don't want to cut academic classes, they will have to add to the school day. They might have to treat fitness as seriously as the No Child Left Behind Act treats reading and math, requiring students to pass assessment tests and teachers to be "highly qualified." Simply passing legislation mandating a little more of the same PE just isn't going to do.

Bob Cullen is a writer who lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

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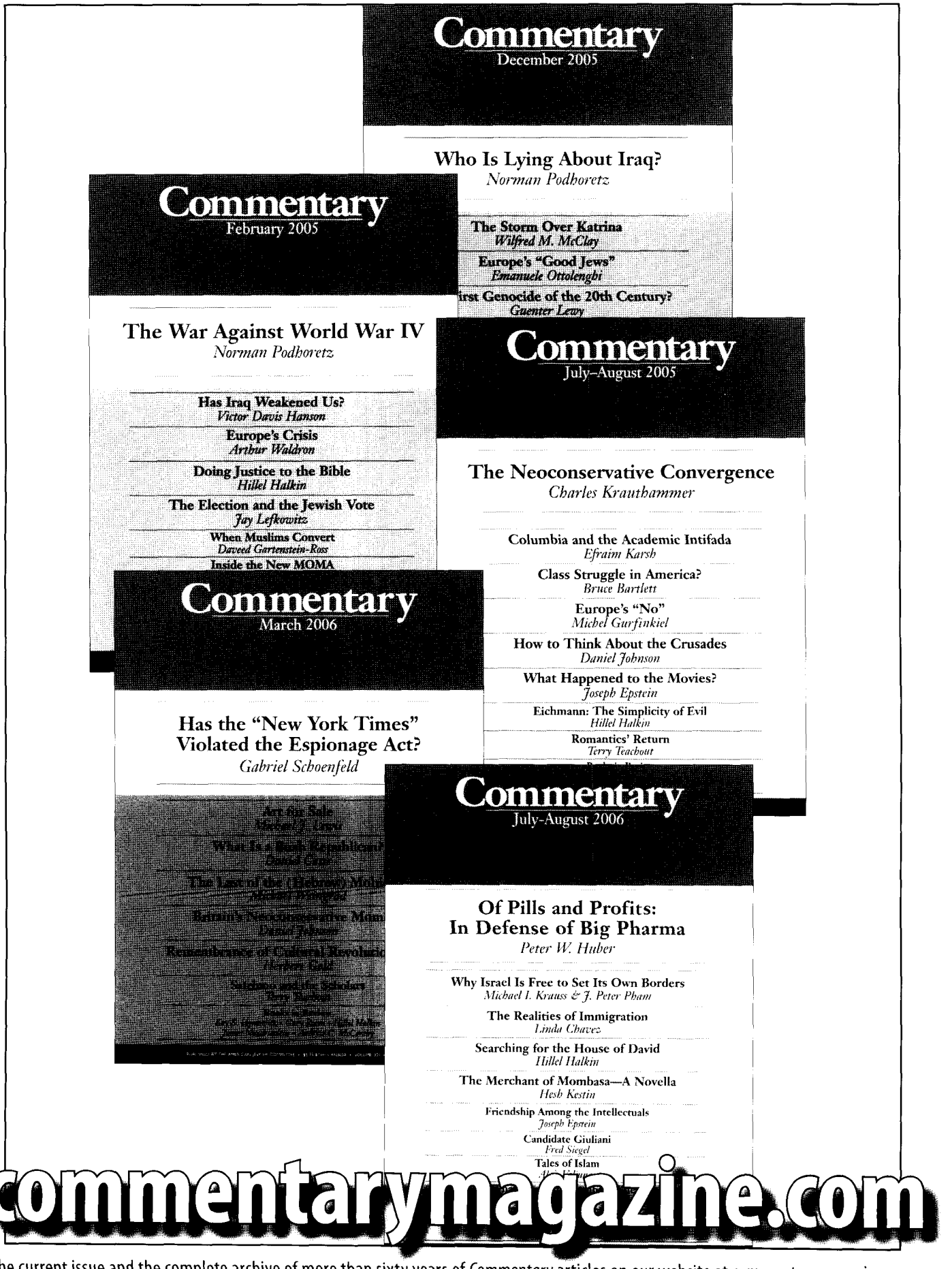

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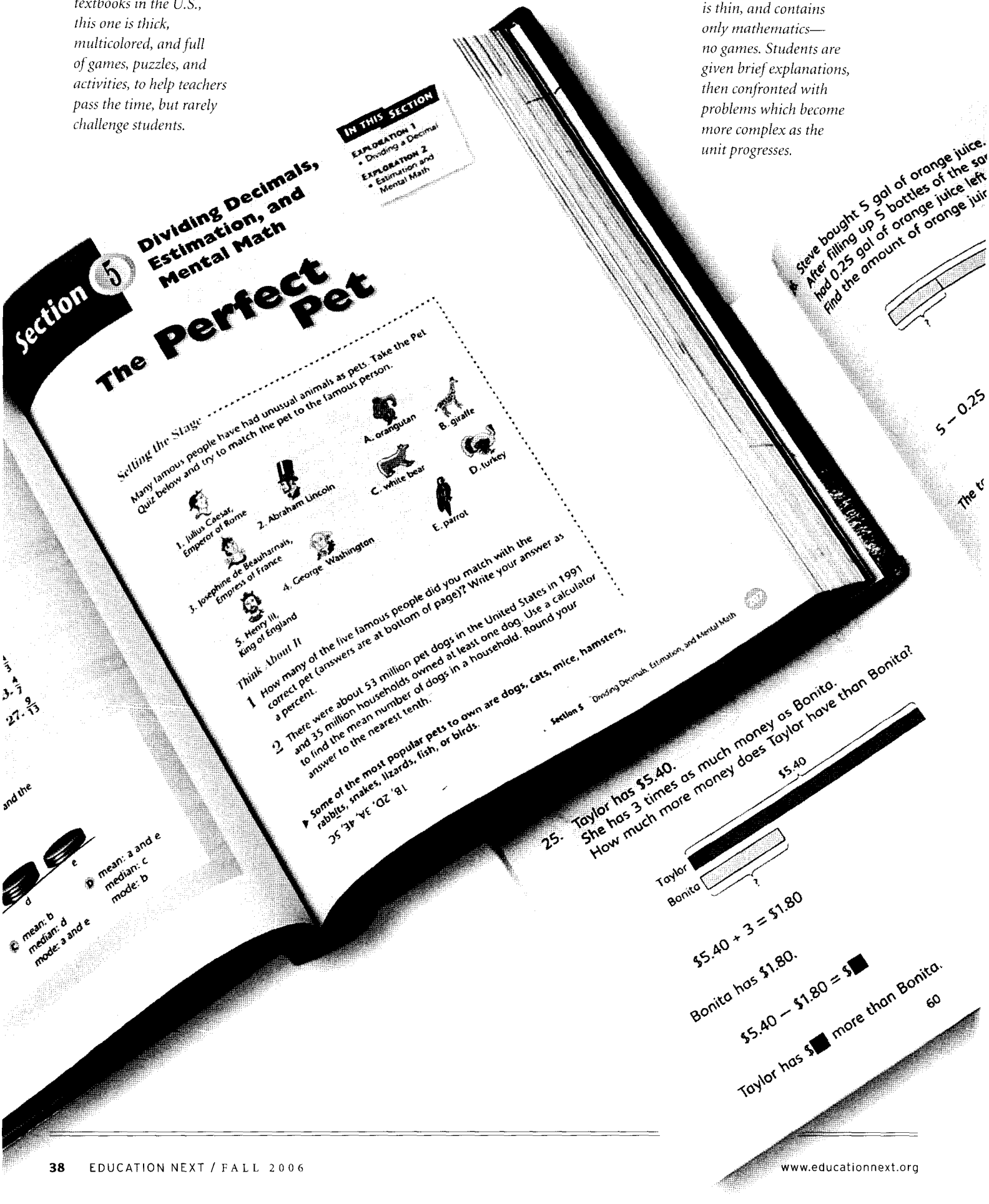
Typical of many math textbooks in the U.S., this one is thick, multicolored, and full of games, puzzles, and activities, to help teachers pass the time, but rarely challenge students.

Singapore Math's textbook is thin, and contains only mathematics—no games. Students are given brief explanations, then confronted with problems which become more complex as the unit progresses.


IN THIS SECTION
EXPLORATION 1
• Dividing a Decimal
EXPLORATION 2
• Estimation and Mental Math
Section 5
Dividing Decimals, Estimation, and Mental Math
The Perfect Pet
Setting the Stage
Many famous people have had unusual animals as pets. Take the Pet Quiz below and try to match the pet to the famous person.
A. orangutan
B. giraffe
C. white bear
D. turkey
E. parrot
1. Julius Caesar, Emperor of Rome
2. Abraham Lincoln
3. Josephine de Beauharnais, Empress of France
4. George Washington
5. Henry III, King of England
Think About It
1 How many of the five famous people did you match with the correct pet (answers are at bottom of page)? Write your answer as a percent.
2 There were about 53 million pet dogs in the United States in 1991 and 35 million households owned at least one dog. Use a calculator to find the mean number of dogs in a household. Round your answer to the nearest tenth.
▶ Some of the most popular pets to own are dogs, cats, mice, hamsters, rabbits, snakes, lizards, fish, or birds.
18, 2D, 3A, 4E, 5C
Section 5 Dividing Decimals, Estimation, and Mental Math
Steve bought 5 gal of orange juice. After filling up 5 bottles of the same size, he had 0.25 gal of orange juice left. Find the amount of orange juice in each bottle.
5 − 0.25
25. Taylor has $5.40. She has 3 times as much money as Bonita. How much more money does Taylor have than Bonita?
$5.40
Taylor
Bonita
?
$5.40 ÷ 3 = $1.80
Bonita has $1.80.
$5.40 − $1.80 = $
Taylor has $ more than Bonita.
60
mean: b
median: d
mode: a and e
mean: a and e
median: c
mode: b

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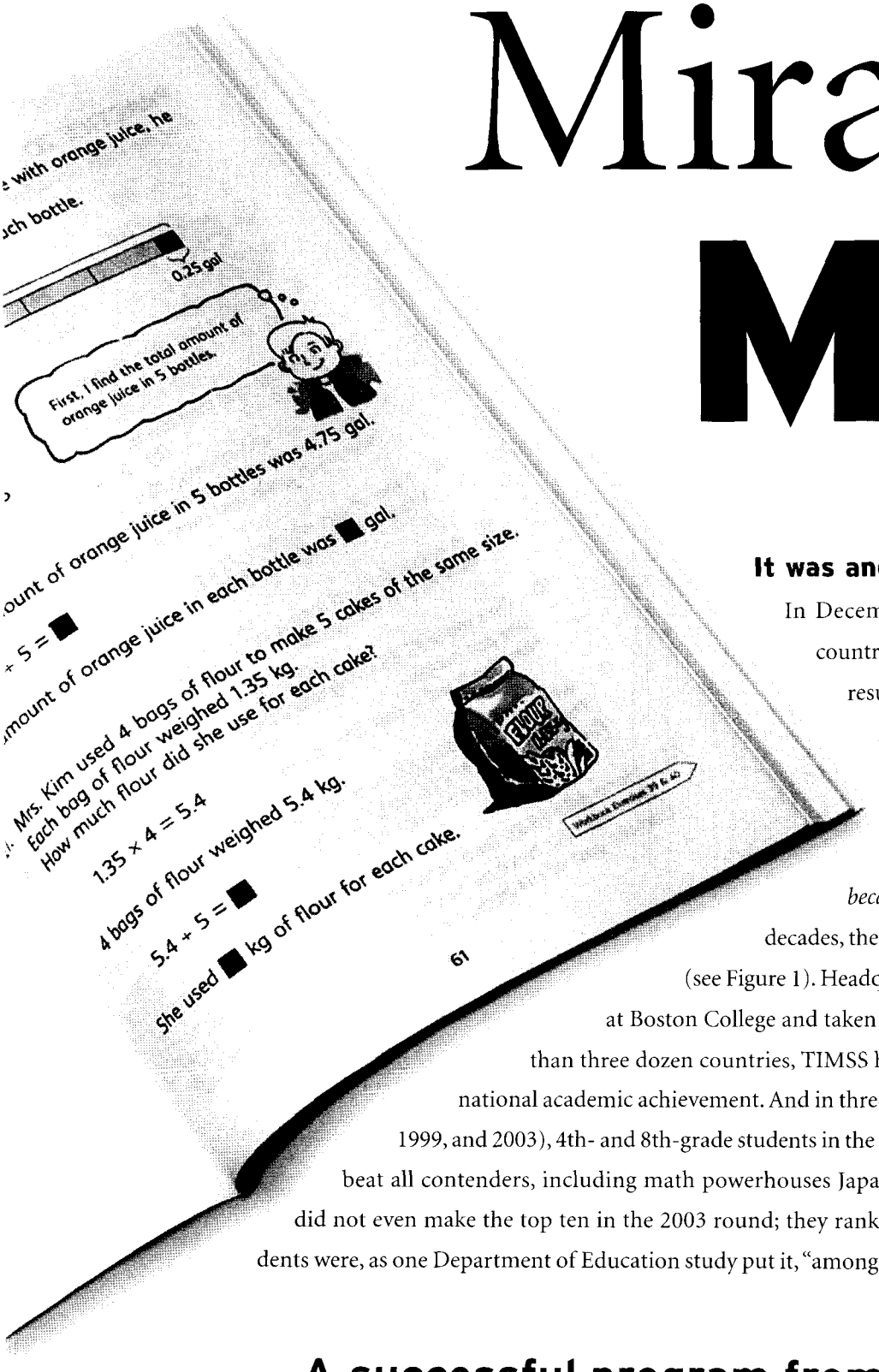
Miracle Math


with orange juice, he
ach bottle.
0.25 gal
First, I find the total amount of orange juice in 5 bottles.
ount of orange juice in 5 bottles was 4.75 gal.
+ 5 = ■
mount of orange juice in each bottle was ■ gal.
Mrs. Kim used 4 bags of flour to make 5 cakes of the same size.
Each bag of flour weighed 1.35 kg.
How much flour did she use for each cake?
1.35 × 4 = 5.4
4 bags of flour weighed 5.4 kg.
5.4 ÷ 5 = ■
She used ■ kg of flour for each cake.
61

BY BARRY GARELICK

It was another body blow to education. In December of 2004, media outlets across the country were abuzz with news of the just-released results of the latest Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) tests. Once again despite highly publicized efforts to reform American math education (some might say *because* of the reform efforts) over the past two decades, the United States did little better than average (see Figure 1). Headquartered at the International Study Center at Boston College and taken by tens of thousands of students in more than three dozen countries, TIMSS has become a respected standard of international academic achievement. And in three consecutive TIMSS test rounds (in 1995, 1999, and 2003), 4th- and 8th-grade students in the former British trading colony of Singapore beat all contenders, including math powerhouses Japan and Taiwan. United States 8th graders did not even make the top ten in the 2003 round; they ranked 16th. Worse, scores for American students were, as one Department of Education study put it, "among the lowest of all industrialized countries."

A successful program from Singapore tests the limits of school reform in the suburbs

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Many professional mathematicians, concerned with the decline of math education in the United States, took a hard look at the Singapore Math methods and texts and liked what they saw.

During the clamor over the TIMSS results (released in December 2004), I heard Robyn Silbey, a math "content coach" from a Rockville, Maryland, public school, being interviewed by Ira Flatow for his *Science Friday* program on National Public Radio. Silbey worked at College Gardens Elementary. She explained that her school was one of four in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) district experimenting with Singapore's math program. And, according to Silbey, it was working. The Singapore texts and methods were so effective in College Gardens that the scores of students there on the math computation portion of the standardized Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) rose from the 50th and 60th percentiles to the low 90s in the first 4 years they were used.

I later learned that an evaluation of the pilot program conducted by MCPS found that in the schools where Singapore Math (SM) was being used as a pilot program, students typically outperformed their peers in other district schools. Yet despite these positive results, three of the four pilot schools dropped out of the program after fewer than four years. Why, I wondered. If the county's own evaluation found benefits from Singapore Math, why not continue using it? In view of America's disappointing rankings in math and Singapore's record of success, why wasn't the Singapore Math program given a serious and extended try?

In the Beginning

While the story of Singapore Math in Montgomery County does not answer all the questions about the persistently poor math literacy of American students, the failure of the program to take hold there does provide disturbing clues about some of the institutional and governmental practices that impede improvement in education—and not just in Montgomery County.

In my early research into what happened in Montgomery County, I met John Hoven, then co-president of the Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County and now a national advisor to NYC HOLD (New York City Honest Open Logical Decisions on Mathematics Education Reform), a nonpartisan advocacy organization that provides information to parents, teachers, and others on math education issues. Hoven, an economist in the Antitrust Division of the U.S. Department of Justice by day, had discovered Singapore Math while waging a successful battle to get MCPS to forgo a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant worth $6 million. The grant would have trained teachers to use a middle-school program called Connected Math, one of several, Hoven learned, that was funded by the Education and Human Resources Division of the NSF and based on standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Though the NCTM is a private organization, it exerts enormous influence over the math standards and texts used by most states and districts in the United States—standards and texts that, in Hoven's view, were failing.

During the campaign against the Connected Math grant, Hoven discovered Singapore Math. He learned that Singapore, whose population is half that of New York City, had begun modifying its education policies in the early 1980s to build up its labor force in such a way as to create technical skills unavailable elsewhere in the Third World. The Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore (now called the Curriculum Planning & Development Institute) had created the math program and the accompanying texts, called *Primary Mathematics* (which were published in English, Singapore's official administrative language, in 1982), to help boost that technological prowess. The *Primary Mathematics* series was at the heart of Singapore's national math curriculum as it achieved its successive TIMSS victories.

Many professional mathematicians, concerned with the decline of math education in the United States, took a hard look at the Singapore Math methods and texts and liked what they saw. The texts have been distributed in the United States by an Oregon company since 1998 and are used by many homeschool parents and promoted by Internet-based parent and professional organizations. In addition, the private nonprofit Rosenbaum Foundation helped fund the implementation of

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Singapore Math programs in scattered sites around the United States and in Israel. A study of Singapore Math conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the U.S. Department of Education (released in January 2005) concluded, "What the United States needs overall are the sound features of the Singapore Mathematics system." In studying several different American school districts that were experimenting with the program, including the Montgomery County Public Schools, AIR researchers found that "Singapore Mathematics textbooks can produce significant boosts in achievement." But the AIR report also cautioned that making Singapore Math work in the United States "will require the same sustained commitment to developing a quality mathematics system that Singapore gave to its reform efforts."

That was a lesson still to be learned in Maryland.

A Long Way from Singapore to Montgomery County

John Hoven and his allies persuaded the Montgomery County Public Schools to try Singapore Math instead of pursuing the Connected Math grant, but instead of receiving $6 million, the district would have to spend its own funds. And that wouldn't be $6 million. "The initial plan was for a $50,000 pilot spread out over two years," Hoven recalls. "It was $50,000 in a $1 billion budget. The money would pay for textbooks and nothing else—no teacher training, nothing." Hoven knew it was just a drop in the bucket for the district, but he was sure that the Asian math program would sell itself.

MCPS selected four middle-class, ethnically diverse, suburban schools—College Gardens in Rockville, Charles R. Drew and Highland View in Silver Spring, and Woodfield in Gaithersburg—to participate in the pilot. But few teachers at the schools realized how different Singapore's approach to math was from what they had been used to; it was nothing less than a total shock to the schools' systems.

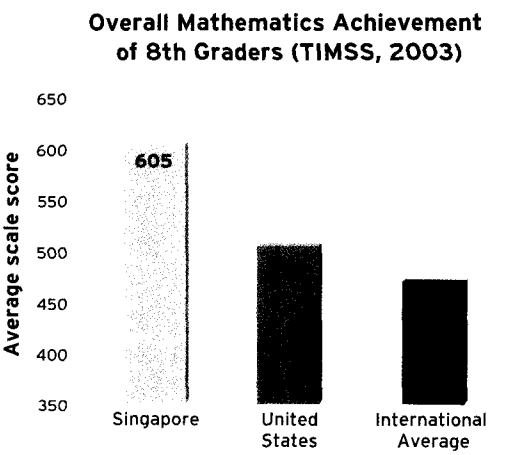
Unlike many American math textbooks, such as *Math Thematics*, published by Houghton Mifflin, which are thick, multicolored, and multicultural, Singapore's books are thin and contain only mathematics. There are no graphics (other than occasional cartoons pertaining to the lesson at hand), no spreadsheet problems, and no problems asking students to use a calculator to find the mean number of dogs in a U.S. household. With SM, students are required to show their mathematical work, not explain in essays how they did the problems or how they felt about them. While a single lesson in a U.S. textbook might span two pages and take one class period to go through, a lesson in a Singapore textbook might use five to ten pages and take several days to complete. The Singapore texts contain no narrative explanation of how a procedure or concept works; instead, there are problems and questions accompanied by pictures that provide hints about what is going on. According to the AIR report, the Singapore program "provides rich problem sets that give students many and varied opportunities to apply the concepts they have learned."

Another key difference is the number of topics covered by Singapore's texts for a single grade. The AIR study frequently criticizes American math texts for being an inch deep and a mile wide, covering a great range of topics with little time spent on developing the material, including mastery of math facts. (One of the texts with which the AIR study compares Singapore's Primary Mathematics series is Everyday Mathematics, a program developed with NSF funding and used widely in Montgomery County.) The MCPS 1st-grade curriculum goals, for instance, contain a number of nonessential topics, such as sorting concrete objects (like Post-its with names of favorite pets on them) into categories, activities that take up instructional time which, critics of the MCPS curriculum argue, could be better spent laying the foundation for algebra in 8th grade.

Singapore's texts also present material in a logical sequence throughout the grades and expect mastery of the material before the move to the next level. In contrast, mainstream American math texts and curricula frequently rely on a "spiral" approach, in which topics are revisited and reviewed. The expectation of that approach is that not all students achieve mastery the first time around. One Ohio school teacher familiar with the spiral approach summed up much of the criticism of

A Model Country (Figure 1)

Singapore's 8th graders had the highest achievement on a 2003 international math test, outscoring American students by a full standard deviation, equivalent to about three to four grade levels of schooling.



SOURCE: Lynch School of Education, Boston College, *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2003*

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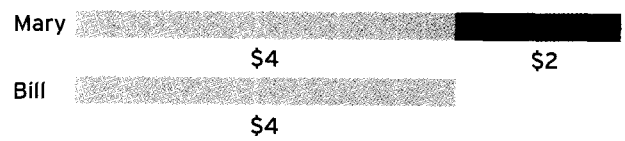
Bar None *A Secret to Singapore's Success*

A typical problem given to math students in the lower grades goes like this:
"Mary and Bill have $10 between them. Mary has $2 more than Bill. How much money does each person have?"

In the United States, students are expected to solve such problems using an approach called "Guess-and-Check," a trial-and-error approach in which the children "try out" combinations of numbers and check to see if they get the right answer. In Singapore, students are taught to solve such problems using the bar-model method. Bar modeling offers an arithmetic and exact approach to math challenges. No guessing. In the problem given, for example, students would draw two bars, labeling one Mary and the other Bill. The sum of the "bars" is $10. Mary's bar is a little longer than Bill's, indicating that Mary has $2 more than Bill.

The extra $2 portion of Mary's bar is darkened so that the undarkened portion of Mary's bar is equal in length to Bill's. Removing the $2 results in two bars of equal length. Now the sum of the two bars is $8 (since $2 has been subtracted from the total), leaving the student to solve the problem of 2 times the short bar (call it B for Bill) = $8.

The student has learned how to solve this problem and divides by 2 to obtain $4 for Bill. Adding back in the $2 for Mary now gives the solution: $4 + $6 = $10, and the difference is clearly $2.



With practice, Singapore Math students learn a simple technique for solving a variety of math problems. The result, as the international tests seem to show, places them ahead of their Guess-and-Check American contemporaries.

— Barry Garelick

the method on an Internet math forum, saying, students "can't remember how to do it when [they] do return—or if they do remember it, it's now being taught in a different way."

The most important feature of Singapore's texts is an ingenious problem-solving strategy built into the curriculum. Word problems are for most students the most difficult part of any mathematics course. Singapore's texts help students tackle them through a technique called "bar modeling," in which students draw a diagram to help them solve the problem. Typically, in U.S. texts, students are taught to use a method called "Guess and Check"—trying combinations of numbers until the right numbers are found that satisfy the conditions of the problem—a method that many professional mathematicians consider inefficient (see sidebar). The bar-modeling technique not only provides a powerful method for solving problems, but also serves as a link to algebra. Symbolic representation of problems, the mainstay of algebra, emerges as a logical extension of the bar-modeling technique.

What Happened in Montgomery County?

Given all of the mathematical strengths of the Singapore program, why was the pilot abandoned so quickly in Montgomery County? The simplest answer is that where Singapore Math worked the best, in College Gardens, it is still being used; where it didn't work as well, it was dropped. But that does not begin to explain what happened.

All four Montgomery County schools used the Singapore Math texts in 2000–01 and 2001–02, but only College Gardens and Highland View kept the program in 2002–03. The "math computation" scores at College Gardens show a dramatic improvement for both 2nd and 4th grades (see Figures 2a and 2b), but in "general math" there is no discernible pattern; all four schools had either no change or a decrease in scores.

Additional results from the pilot were detailed in the evaluation conducted by the MCPS Office of Shared Accountability after the second year of the experiment. The county evaluators found that students in the four Singapore Math pilot schools generally progressed through the curriculum at an accelerated pace compared with their peers in control schools. But while the school district's evaluation was positive in tone (Singapore Math "helped prepare students for higher-level math placements in middle school"), it reported mixed results and offered no recommendation for expansion.

Because the effectiveness of a program as sophisticated and multidimensional as Singapore Math cannot be thoroughly evaluated in just two years of testing, the story of its failure in

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Montgomery County says more about school politics and finances than about math programs. (It would help, for instance, to track students who went through Singapore's program through their 8th-grade tests to ascertain how well they were prepared for algebra.) The mixed math results of the county's evaluation should have been seen for what they were: an interim assessment. Instead, the county ended the funding for the program after the second year. If schools wished to continue, they had to pay for the materials out of their own budgets, which they didn't need to do if they used district-approved texts such as *Everyday Mathematics*.

Detailing the many reasons for dropping support for the pilot by Montgomery County without waiting for long-term results would take more space than is available here. But we can get a sense of the thing by examining some of the reasons that the three schools gave for quitting Singapore Math and those given by College Gardens for staying with it.

The first problem was lack of planning and preparation. The depth and breadth of the differences between Singapore Math and American math were not appreciated. The decision to use Singapore Math was made in 1999, for instance, but textbooks and other teaching materials did not arrive at the four schools until late spring the following year, giving teachers just three months to prepare to introduce the program to students in the fall of 2000.

The Singapore Math manuals were another problem: they provided very little guidance on how to teach a particular lesson—because they are written for teachers who, for the most part, have a deeper understanding of mathematics than most U.S. teachers do. That dilemma was compounded by the lack of experience with Singapore's program by Montgomery County and its delay in training teachers to use it. The Montgomery County Public Schools eventually developed a training program, but some people believe it was too little, too late. College Gardens and Highland View found funds to hire Singapore Math specialists (like Robyn Silbey) to help get the program off the ground and coordinate the training within their schools. Scott Baldridge, a Louisiana State University mathematician who provides professional training to teachers in implementing the Singapore program, believes that such training helps. "Some teachers get it on their own," he says, "but many need professional development to see how the curriculum interacts with the students over several years."

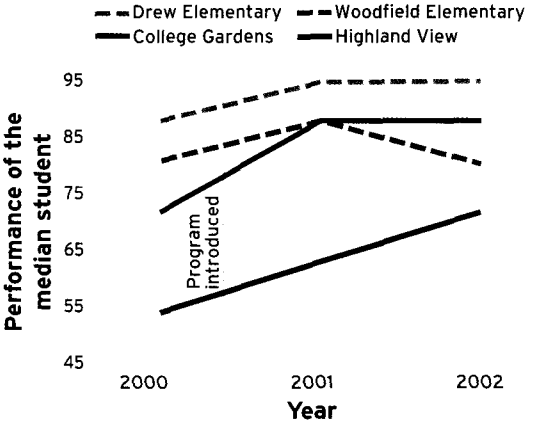
Even with adequate training, the two-year span of the pilot resulted in three of the pilot schools (all except College Gardens) introducing Singapore Math all at once, across all grades, which put older children at a severe disadvantage, since Singapore Math concepts build on one another. This helps to explain the difference in the math test results.

Another complaint expressed by teachers and administrators in all four schools was that Singapore Math was not in line with state standards. Indeed, the state's academic standards include data analysis, statistics, and probability, which Singapore's texts do not address. But it is more complicated than that since, by state law, each school district has authority over its own curriculum. Although required to administer the state tests, school districts are not required to align their

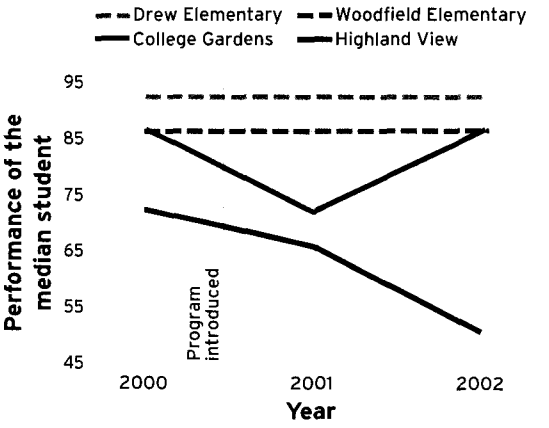
Early Evidence (Figures 2a and 2b)

Two years after Singapore Math was introduced, 4th graders in the four Montgomery County (Maryland) schools implementing the program scored higher in math computation. However, the scores on the general mathematics section were flat or negative.

Math Computation Performance of 4th Graders Before and After the Introduction of Singapore Math



General Mathematics Performance of 4th Graders Before and After the Introduction of Singapore Math



Note: Performance is the national percentile rank on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS).

SOURCE: Maryland State Department of Education

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Rather than waste students' time with inefficient methods for solving problems, Singapore's texts provide instruction that eliminates trial and error, one of the goals of mathematics.

curriculum with the state standards. That means, says Hoven, that "they can choose to aim for world-class standards instead, which at one time was one of the goals of the MCPS Long-Range Plan." But the plan was revised to be aligned with state standards instead—a move, say some, that was, in effect, a decision to lower Montgomery County's standards.

This brings us to the question of money. Eileen MacFarlane, principal at Drew, said that her school initially supplemented Singapore Math with additional material on statistics, data, and probability to cover the misalignment, but the cost of purchasing Singapore's materials from their own budget became a problem.

Joanne Steckler, now retired as principal of Highland View, said, "No one told us to drop the program." But being required to buy its own materials had the same effect. "For one year we did purchase our own Singapore materials," said Steckler. "But we did not want other curriculum areas to suffer because of lack of funds to purchase materials, so we gave up Singapore Math."

Shawn Miller, principal of Woodfield Elementary, also cited the cost of the texts. Once the county stopped funding Singapore Math, Miller made the decision to go with the county-approved program, Everyday Mathematics, which, he said, "was better aligned with the state curriculum."

With such standards-alignment and budget concerns, the schools had a safe way to bow out of the pilot.

A Culture Shock to the System

But budget questions were hardly fundamental. Taking on a program like Singapore Math meant going against what many teachers believed math education to be about; surely, it was not what they were trained for. Since the success of Singapore's programs relies in many ways on more traditional approaches to math education, such as explicit instruction and giving students many problems to solve, in some ways its very success represented a slap in the face to American math reformers, many of whom have worked hard to eliminate such techniques from the teaching canon.

Gail Burrill, a former president of the NCTM, suggests quite bluntly that the success of Singapore Math cannot be imported. "These are books used by a different culture, a culture that is more homogeneous, and a culture that has a consistent way of thinking about mathematics." And Cathy Seeley, a former president of the NCTM, hints as much by arguing that Singapore's success (as well as that of other Asian countries) is not about the textbook. "We have to look beyond their textbooks to determine what these lessons are."

The logic of the argument that it is the Asian culture or something "beyond their textbooks" that produces math success leads to the conclusion that, as NCTM adherents often contend, content doesn't matter nearly as much as the teacher or the culture that produces the "proper conditions for learning." Eileen MacFarlane maintained that the teachers in the Singapore pilots drew from the texts, but then quickly added, "The text is a resource, not a curriculum." She said this despite her enthusiasm for Singapore's program.

But the belief that the difference between Singapore Math and American math is just in the teaching or, as some suggest, the culture, is a rationalization, says David Klein, a mathematician at California State University, Northridge. "Math reformers assume that math education is bad in the United States because the NCTM reforms were not properly implemented nor understood by teachers," he continues. "They never consider the possibility that the NCTM standards themselves and the textbooks written for those standards are one of the causes of poor math education in this country."

The only person I heard openly disagree with the "teacher not text" argument was Dr. Sherry Liebes, then the principal of College Gardens, the only school that kept the program. While she said that teacher training is important, she added that Singapore's texts provide a structured curriculum, and thus "It's one less thing for teachers to worry about." This notion was echoed in the AIR study, which quoted a teacher in one of the pilot schools in Montgomery County: "Having to explain Singapore Mathematics made

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me understand that I never really understood the mathematics I was teaching."

Another stumbling block for the Maryland teachers was their concern that the Singapore Math program did not contain "real-world" activities. The term, as used by those who follow the ideas supported by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and education schools for teaching math, generally means a problem for which American students have not received much instruction or preparation. This is intentional, it turns out, because it is believed to be good for students to learn to approach problems for which they have not received explicit preparation. The National Education Association (NEA), for instance, in its online version of "A Parent's Guide to Helping Your Child with Today's Math," gives an example of a "real-world" problem:

> A farmer sends his daughter and son out into the barnyard to count the number of chickens and pigs. When they return the son says that he counted 200 legs but the daughter says she counted 70 heads. How many pigs and chickens does the farmer have?

The NEA then suggests that some students may solve the problem using algebra (those who know how to do so, that is), while others might solve it using Guess and Check. Still others may choose to draw pictures to solve it. The NEA admits that some methods might be considered more efficient, but points out that the correct answer can be found using multiple methods and that "by allowing students to think flexibly about numbers, we encourage them to 'own' the math forever, instead of 'borrowing' until class is over." That this real-world problem depicts an approach that no sensible person would use in counting pigs and chickens is beside the point.

This kind of real-world math is indeed missing from Singapore's program—apparently, if TIMSS tests mean anything, without much harm. Rather than waste students' time with inefficient methods for solving problems, Singapore's texts provide instruction that eliminates trial and error, one of the goals of mathematics. Bar modeling is a powerful pictorial technique that results in one answer, deduced by using mathematical principles that students have learned rather than by employing the haphazard trial-and-error method of Guess and Check.

For One Brief Shining Moment

An exact description of which differences in math instruction matter most is perhaps impossible. For instance, an emphasis on sequential mastery of skills that builds on previously acquired skills is a key component of the Singapore Math program and not important in the American approach, where activities don't require such skills. While the latter creates the illusion of equal achievement, international tests like the TIMSS would seem to provide a reality check on that illusion.

The struggle to make math instruction work, of course, is not limited to Montgomery County. In the state of Washington, parent protests against the adoption of several standard math curricula (like Connected Math) led a state representative to introduce a bill earlier this year to put Singapore Math in all the state's elementary schools. And in New York City, Elizabeth Carson, who heads NYC HOLD, has led a battle for years to rid the city's schools of programs like Everyday Mathematics. She calls it a "tragedy for our children and our nation" that American attempts at math reform "bear no resemblance to the programs and standards of the highest-achieving nations."

Having watched as three of the four schools dropped Singapore's program in Montgomery County, John Hoven shared Carson's concern. Discouraged, he resigned a year ago from the county's Gifted and Talented Association. "I had stopped believing I could make a difference," he says. "I felt it was time for someone else to try."

In the meantime, the decline in the numbers of U.S.-trained scientists and engineers, compared with the increasing numbers of those trained in Asian countries, has not gone unnoticed. In this year's State of the Union address, President George W. Bush stated: "We need to encourage children to take more math and science, and make sure those courses are rigorous enough to compete with other nations." He proposed "to train 70,000 high-school teachers to lead Advanced Placement courses in math and science ... bring 30,000 math and science professionals to teach in classrooms ... and give early help to students who struggle with math, so they have a better chance at good, high-wage jobs."

A few months later, President Bush created the National Mathematics Advisory Panel to advise the White House and the secretary of education on the best use of scientifically based research to advance the teaching and learning of mathematics. The panel includes several people who have actively fought against the NCTM-led "fuzzy math" trend in this country.

While the goal of bolstering high-school math is a laudable one, the success of high-school students in math depends on what they've learned in the lower grades. If those foundations are weak, the addition of Advanced Placement courses in math and science in high schools will prove to be a weak enhancement. Unfortunately, changing the way math is taught in the lower grades appears to threaten an education philosophy and method that is pervasive in our schools, and does not move us towards academic excellence.

Barry Garelick is an analyst for the federal government and lives in the Washington, D.C., area. He is a national advisor to NYC HOLD, an education advocacy organization that addresses mathematics education in schools throughout the United States.

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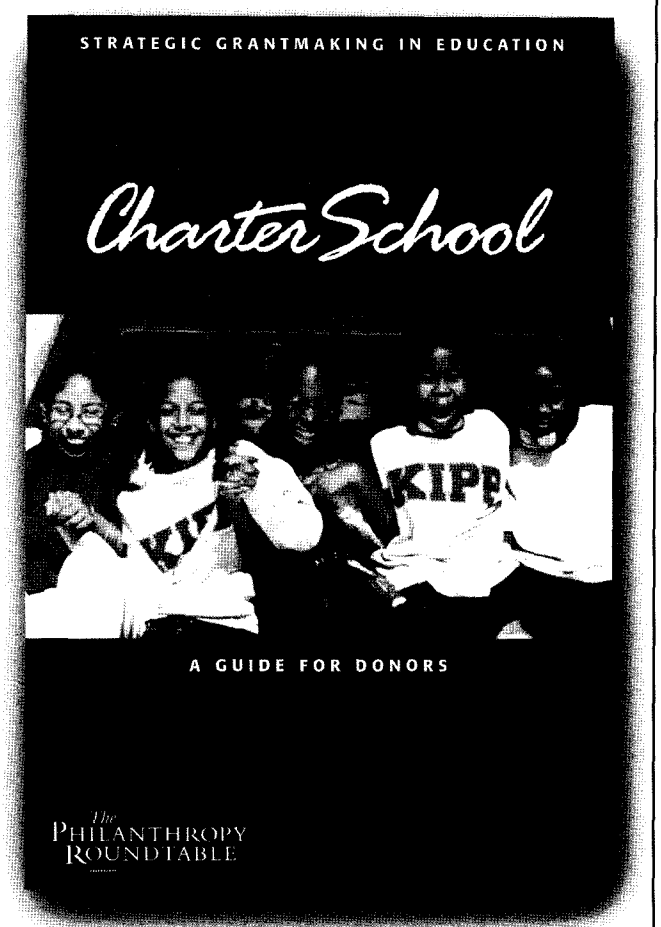
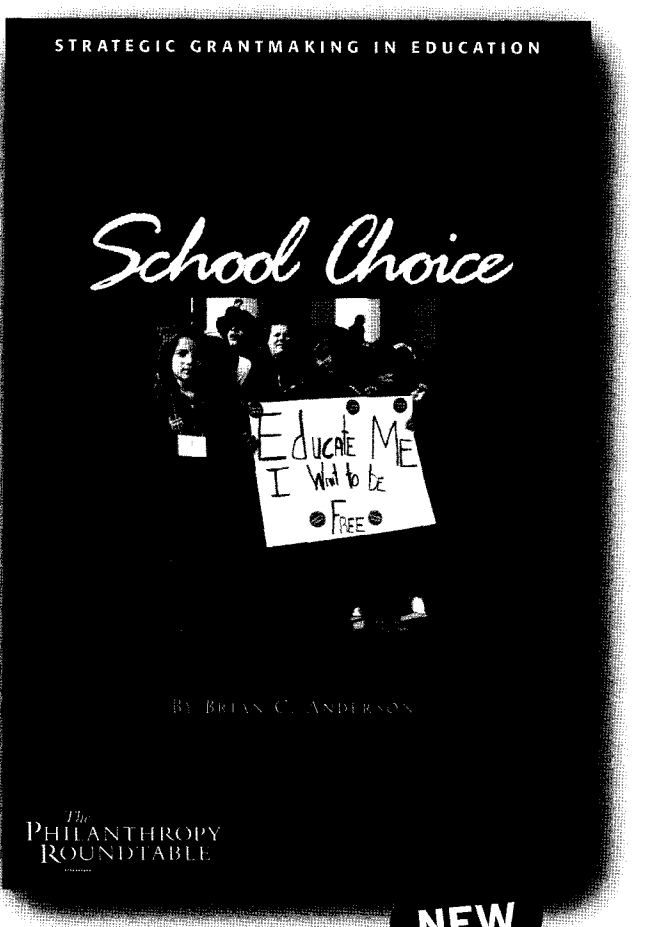
Strategic Grantmaking in Education



Jump-starting the Charter School Movement: A Guide for Donors

The Roundtable commissioned this guide in order to provide donors of all shapes and sizes with strategic ways to support a strong charter school movement in their communities and across the nation. This book draws on the experience of the most active and effective charter funders.



NEW

A Donor's Guide to School Choice
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Several powerful tools for change fall under the term "school choice:" private scholarships, charter schools, tax credits, and vouchers. This guide provides a road map to all these options, with advice from veteran donors on the pros and cons of each. Invaluable for any donor seeking to improve all schools and to help low-income children attend high-quality schools.

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National Standards

Should the federal government tell schools what to teach?

A New New Federalism
48

Hoop Hassles
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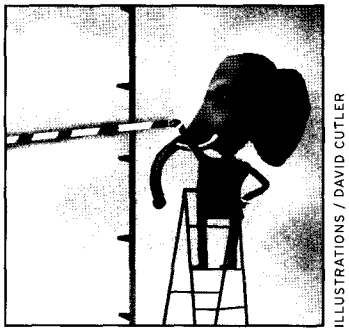

Political Realities
56

ILLUSTRATIONS / DAVID CUTLER

At a time of increasing global economic competition, continued signs of backsliding in state oversight of schools, and growing impatience with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the debate over national education standards has heated up.

Chester Finn and Michael Petrilli see national standards as the surest route to leaving no child left behind. **James Peyser** says national standards will harm charter schools and hamstring reform-minded states. **Robert Gordon** says national standards are now a tough sell for Republicans, but provide a ready-made opportunity for Democrats.

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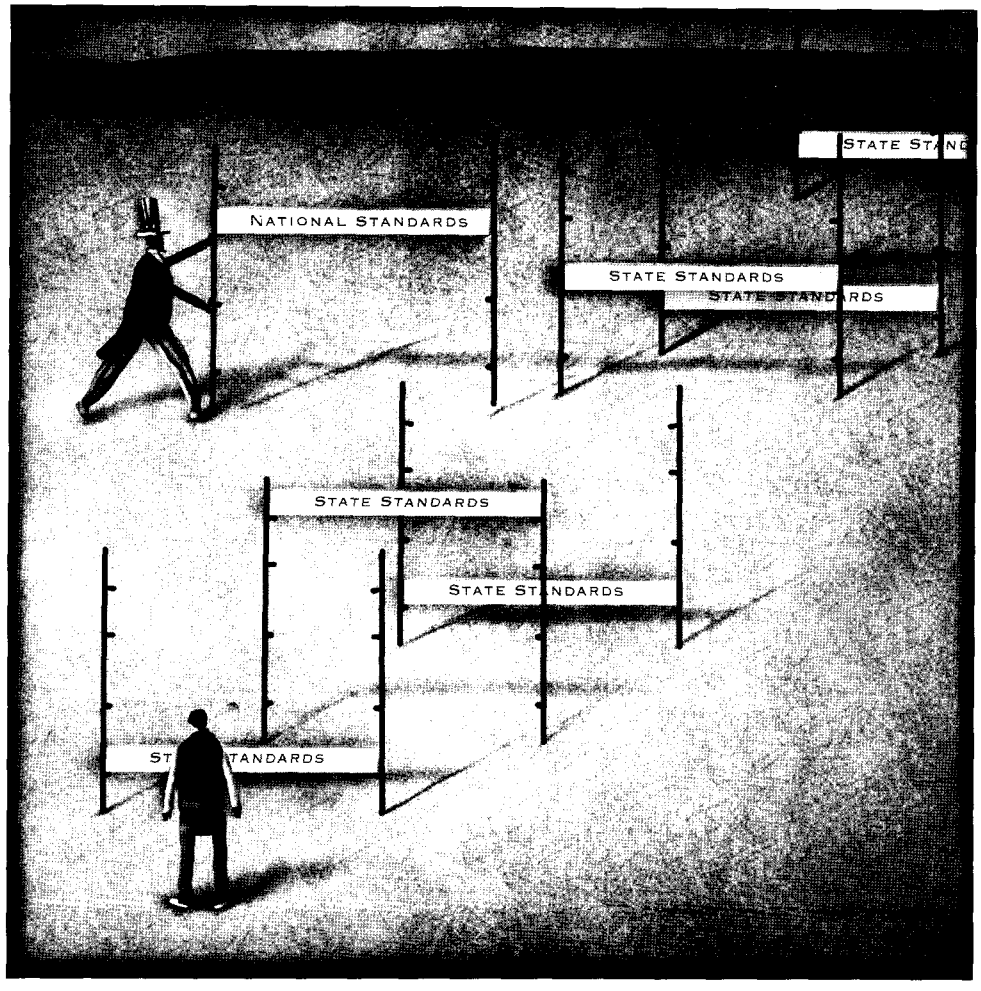
A New New Federalism

The case for national standards and tests



The federal government has pushed far too deeply into the routines and operations of the nation's public schools, now regulating everything from teacher credentials to the selection of reading programs.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) made the problem worse. Ironically, the one way to extricate Washington from the minutiae of K–12 education is to give it more power in one realm—specifically, the power to set national standards and tests—and then ask it to back off from just about everything else.

The federal role in education has always been a disappointment and a frustration. For most of our history, Uncle Sam steered clear of the issue; in the days of Jim Crow, this amounted to

BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI AND CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

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shameful neglect. After *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the pendulum began to swing toward the other extreme: Washington became an overbearing, micromanaging schoolmarm, attempting to coerce equity, then excellence, from the K–12 system through regulation and bribery. This, too, has failed to produce schools of which our nation can be proud.

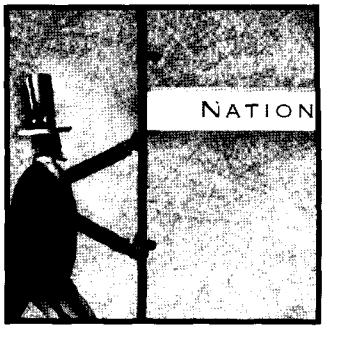
NCLB was supposed to improve the situation, to signal a new New Deal between the federal government and the states. Think management. In concept, the states would embrace tough accountability for their schools and districts and the schools would yield markedly higher achievement; the feds would back away from regulation and slash the red tape. The combination would give schools what they needed to be successful: strong incentives to boost student achievement, combined with the freedom of action to innovate and get the job done. When announcing his program in 2001, George W. Bush described the principle this way: "If local schools do not have the freedom to change, they cannot be held accountable for failing to change." Parents, too, would be empowered through additional information and school choice, said the president. Freedom and transparency would rule, and the payoff would be millions more "proficient" kids.

Unfortunately, politics, compromise, and bureaucracy reared their familiar visages. Neither states nor the feds have kept their part of the grand bargain, leaving our schools undermotivated and overregulated, our parents frustrated and bewildered, millions of our kids subproficient, and thousands of our schools stuck with "in need of improvement" labels but not improving.

The Race to the Bottom

Consider the states' reaction to NCLB. Evidence is mounting that they are responding by lowering their standards, making their tests easier, and shielding their schools from accountability. Some of this is happening in plain view; Missouri, for example, recently backed away from its high standards specifically because NCLB was fingering so many of its schools as subpar. Many other states are gaming the system behind closed doors. One sign of this quiet rebellion is the growing disparity between student performance on state exams and on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). According to an analysis by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, from 2003 to 2005 at least 20 states posted gains on their own 8th-grade reading exams, yet none of these showed progress at the "proficient" level on NAEP. While there could be explanations for this discrepancy, one must suspect that states are finding subtle ways to make their own tests easier.

What would prompt states to lower the bar? After all, money flows to schools whether they make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or not. Most likely, the incentives to which they



Missouri, for example, recently backed away from its high standards specifically because NCLB was fingering so many of its schools as subpar. Many other states are gaming the system behind closed doors.

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are responding are not those imposed from Washington but from below: irate local superintendents and school board members who don't want NCLB to shine a harsh light on their schools' shortcomings.

This pressure appears to be having an impact beyond tests. States are also finding ways to game their definitions of AYP to let more schools off the hook. In Oklahoma, for example, the number of schools failing to make AYP dropped by 85 percent from 2003–04 to 2004–05, not because its students learned more but because bureaucrats made a technical change to the state's NCLB formula. Such educational finagling is rampant, and explains why, as standards are supposedly being ratcheted up the closer we get to 2014 (when all students are to be "proficient"), the number of schools across the nation "in need of improvement" is stable. Is there any doubt that the standards-and-accountability movement is in peril?

There are a few happy exceptions. Massachusetts is fairly termed the "poster child" for NCLB. Its decade-old education reforms anticipated many of NCLB's policies, thus allowing the Bay State to keep on course when the federal law came along. Its academic standards are outstanding, its assessment system is highly regarded, and its results are impressive. Massachusetts now posts America's highest test scores in several categories. Recent gains among its poor and minority students are especially compelling. Nor have state officials used the federal law as an excuse to lower the bar. But basing our lessons on the Massachusetts experience is like judging a school's obesity problem by examining the track team. Things look good there, but the sample is by no means representative. Massachusetts school reform may well be worse off under national standards and tests, but that can't be said about most other jurisdictions.

What Ever Happened to Deregulation?

Washington's record is equally unimpressive. Despite the rhetoric about NCLB providing "flexibility in return for accountability," by the time President Bush's law cleared Congress there was precious little flexibility left. Most of the rules and regulations that had accreted over the previous 40 years stayed in place; NCLB's new "flex" programs have gone largely unused because they offer scant relief. Meanwhile, Uncle Sam added two huge mandates: that every teacher in the country be "highly qualified" in very specific ways and that schools use "scientifically based" classroom methods, especially teaching young children to read. Neither of these is without merit, but the cumulative effect is to shackle schools with red tape rather than encourage innovation and a "whatever it takes" attitude. State and district officials respond predictably: by going through the motions, focusing on compliance instead of performance, playing games with federal regulators, and cutting secret side deals with Washington at the political level.

The most pernicious example of this cat-and-mouse game involves the standards-and-accountability system itself. We've already seen how states try to work the system; in response, federal officials write new rules in an effort to force states to live up to the spirit of the law. For example, early in the NCLB implementation process, some states discovered that they could shield their schools from its sanctions if they decreed that the performance of subgroups, such as disabled students, would only count toward AYP if the groups were quite large. Other states followed suit; after the Associated Press reported that upward of 2 million children—most of them minorities—were being excluded from NCLB's accountability system via such gimmicks, Congress pressured the Department of Education to rein in the practice. Yet we know that states will find new ways to punch holes in the law. They always do. And, as we can attest from personal experience, the Education Department lacks the competence, capacity, and political resolve to win this war. So we're left with classic compliance-oriented behavior around a performance-oriented law. And lots of games being played and smoke blown.

Even as the bureaucrats battle over nuanced issues of measurement, Washington has no say over what really matters: the content of the academic standards, the rigor of the tests, or the ultimate consequences for school failure. NCLB made the wrong compromise. Instead of being tight about results and loose about means, it tries to be tight about means and heedless as to ends.

Parents, meanwhile, face a paradox. They have access to loads of new data but, because the yardstick keeps changing and comparability ends at the state line, they actually have little information about how their child's school is really doing.

Surely there's a better way.

The New New Federalism: Measure Results, Then Get Out of the Way

We envision a radically different approach, a role reversal in which the feds play a much smaller role in the day-to-day affairs of local schools, but are much more specific about achievement expectations. Under this scenario, Washington would do three things—and only three things—in K–12 education: 1) fund high-quality research and data gathering; 2) distribute dollars (ideally through a formula weighted by student needs); and 3) measure the schools' progress with common standards and tests, just like other grown-up countries do. That's it. Okay, it should also investigate civil rights violations. Full stop. Nothing else.

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Is such a deal possible? James Peyser is skeptical (see "Hoop Hassles," p. 52); once the feds set the standards, he argues, they will inevitably intervene when the results disappoint. The kind of federal restraint that we picture would be an historical anomaly. Furthermore, who is to say that Washington will set rigorous standards rather than the vague or politically correct kind that are in place in most states today?

We recognize these concerns. So here's a proposal; it's a version of "if you build it, they will come." First, set the standards and develop the tests, building on the excellent ones from Massachusetts, Indiana, and California. Make them available for public inspection. Develop a national version of AYP. Then offer the states a deal: if you opt into this national measurement and reporting system, all the pesky federal rules (such as "highly qualified teachers") go away. Or you can keep your own standards and tests—and the full panoply of federal regulations.

We suspect that many state officials would jump at the opportunity to switch. After all, it provides them with political cover to do the right thing. Before long you'd have de facto national standards, without any states being forced to submit. And if the feds renege and go back to their micromanaging ways, states are free to pull out—and return to their heedless ways.

It's a win-win plan. Parents would have clear signals about the effectiveness of their child's school, and the other schools they might choose among. As in England, with its national "league tables" of school achievement, educators and policymakers could make simple, valid comparisons. (We would favor "value-added" as well as absolute comparisons.) Principals and superintendents, freed from the red tape that frustrates them, would have the authority and incentives to make real change, and would be denied the excuse that "the feds won't let me." Employers would have comparable information about educational quality from sea to shining sea. And, through the standards, our society would have a common cultural language to support the cause of *E Pluribus Unum*.

We know that many conservatives and Republicans recoil at the idea of national standards and tests. To date, Washington's expanding role in education has left local schools with less power and authority and more obstacles and headaches. But conservatives should ask themselves: what's going to change this situation? Efforts to roll back Washington's role in K–12 education always crash and burn. It's simply too important an issue to the nation's citizens. National standards and tests just might be the way out of the morass—and the way into the education future that our country needs.

Uncle Sam mandates that every teacher in the country be "highly qualified" in very specific ways and that schools use "scientifically based" classroom methods, especially teaching young children to read. Neither of these is without merit, but the cumulative effect is to shackle schools with red tape.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, where Michael J. Petrilli is a vice president. Both are affiliated with Stanford's Hoover Institution.

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Hoop Hassles

Incentives, not national control

There can be little doubt that there is wide variation in the rigor and quality of state standards and assessments.

Moreover, it is clear that the vast majority of states have set their academic achievement bar far lower than federal standards, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) pegs its accountability mechanism to state test results, rather than NAEP, there is a natural incentive for states to maintain or even weaken their already-low standards. If this pattern of behavior persists, much of NCLB's promised educational benefit will be lost.

BY JAMES A. PEYSER

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One response to this disappointing reality has been a renewed call for nationalized standards and assessments. The concept of common standards for all American children has a definite appeal. After all, algebra is the same in Massachusetts as it is in Mississippi. More tellingly, in an era of labor mobility and global competition, our national economic well-being is threatened by the weakness of many state education systems. In other words, it matters to California employers that New Jersey's academic standards are low.

Nevertheless, transforming NAEP (or its successor) into a mandatory national test to replace state assessments as the primary measure of school and student performance is a highly questionable proposition. Indeed, the whole enterprise sounds like a case study of being careful what you wish for; it is fraught with potential for producing a cure that is worse than the disease.

We're from Washington and We're Here to Help

Let me frame my comments by declaring that I am an NCLB supporter, albeit one who has a narrow view of the law's virtues and a fairly jaundiced view of its most sweeping aspirations. In my opinion, NCLB's greatest value is creating accountability for the allocation and use of federal funds with at least some connection to school performance and student outcomes.

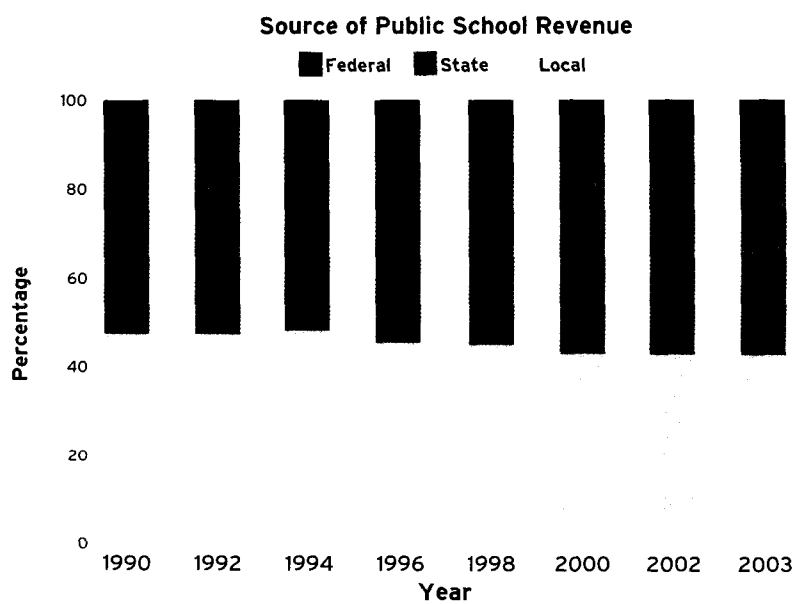
At its most basic level, NCLB introduces the notion that federal money will continue to flow only if districts and states are actually able to demonstrate that they can run effective schools, not simply comply with rules and regulations. The only way to reliably evaluate such performance is through a system of standards and assessments. I'm sorry to say that most of the law's other requirements (like "highly qualified" teachers) seem to me mostly symbolic and prone to creative (and wasteful) noncompliance or endless backsliding. The federal dollar itself is still just a small slice of the education funding pie (see Figure 1).

Equally important, we take the federal government's limited constitutional role seriously. There are always good reasons for creating a single, national solution to the problems of the day, whether the problem is education, welfare, health care, housing, transportation, or economic development. In almost all these cases, federal policies and programs have had serious negative consequences that all too frequently offset their benefits, stemming at least in part from the conceit that complex human problems can be solved by getting a bunch of smart people together to craft an elegant solution.

Establishing a single set of national standards and assessments would effectively make the federal government the owner and operator of America's public education system. This would in turn inevitably draw the Department of Education deeper and deeper into the business of operating schools, most likely by issuing an ever-expanding set of ineffectual yet burdensome edicts. Such an outcome is not consistent with my view of a wise and limited federal government.

Little Leverage (Figure 1)

Although the portion of public school revenue from the federal government has increased slightly over the past 13 years, state and local governments continue to carry more than 90 percent of the budget burden.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey"

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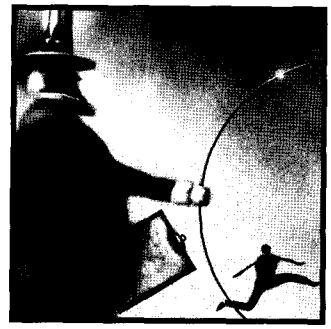
Placing sole responsibility for standard setting with the federal government could result in the worst of all possible worlds: national standards and assessments that embrace the conventional wisdom and social agendas of the education "experts" who staff our schools of education, teachers unions, and national associations.



The State of the States

The question on the table should not be whether or how to adopt national standards, but what problem are we trying to solve? There is a great deal of frustration, which I share, that state standards are inconsistent and that some states are making themselves look better than they really are by gaming the system. While that's truly unfortunate, I think this controversy is ultimately a sideshow. The real issue is how to substantially raise the level of academic achievement.

My home state of Massachusetts is arguably an NCLB poster child. We have curricular standards that are highly regarded. We have assessments aligned with those standards and they are reasonably consistent with NAEP. And we have an accountability system that has led to at least a few cases of direct state intervention in underperforming schools and districts. Nevertheless, I would not pretend to say that we have yet figured out how to dramatically and persistently improve educational outcomes, especially for poor kids. Standards, assessments, and accountability are absolutely necessary, but they are not even close to sufficient. Creating great schools is infinitely more messy and contextual than creating a performance measurement system. Expending intellectual and political capital on nationalizing the yardstick is probably not as valuable as applying these scarce resources to building great schools.

For many states, moving to NAEP-based standards would clearly be a step in the right direction, at least in the long term. But making the transition by federal fiat would in all likelihood stop current progress in its tracks for all states, mine included. In Massachusetts, we have made measurable progress in performance, although in many cases these gains have been incremental and are beginning to level off. I'm convinced that much of the modest success we've enjoyed has been tied to the adoption of a statewide graduation requirement based on our 10th-grade MCAS test (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), beginning with the class of 2003, not the result of a national standard or ethic. That graduation requirement set the passing standard at "needs improvement," which is roughly equivalent to NAEP's "basic" level. Now that we are seeing the vast majority of students get over this threshold, the current challenge is raising everyone's sights toward proficiency. This will be as difficult a process as setting the graduation requirement in the first place, which was no walk in the park.

If we were all of a sudden to drop MCAS in favor of NAEP, or some other national test, I have no doubt that all forward momentum would stop as we attempted to bring our state laws and regulations in line with new federal requirements and as schools recalibrated their education programs to a slightly different set of standards and tests. The process would again get in the way of the substance. From where I sit, this interregnum would serve no higher purpose for the children of my state, and would be damaging to the current cohort of public school students, especially those entering the upper grades.

Carrots, Not Sticks

Finally, under the heading of unintended consequences, I am very fearful that placing sole responsibility for standard setting with the federal government could result in the worst of all possible worlds: national standards and assessments that embrace the conventional wisdom and social agendas of the education "experts" who staff our schools of education, teachers unions, and national associations. It's naive to believe that the cloistered environment of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), NAEP's progenitor, can be sustained if the stakes are raised so high. Although the rhetoric has been dampened or driven underground, the curriculum wars are not yet over. In a different political context, one that is more hospitable to the "education establishment," there should be no doubt that there would be enormous pressure to mold national standards and

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assessments to fit that establishment's worldview. Indeed, as Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch acknowledged recently in the *Wall Street Journal*, the Bush administration itself is already responding to the heat by turning a blind eye to stagnant NAEP results in order to showcase NCLB's success and "to accommodate state pleas for flexibility."

If we could adopt a constitutional amendment empowering Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, and their heirs to oversee the development and maintenance of national standards, I'd be willing to set aside my reservations and sign on the dotted line. But short of that unlikely occurrence, centralizing this much power in a single place creates far more risk of catastrophe than allowing 50 states to muddle along their more diverse paths.

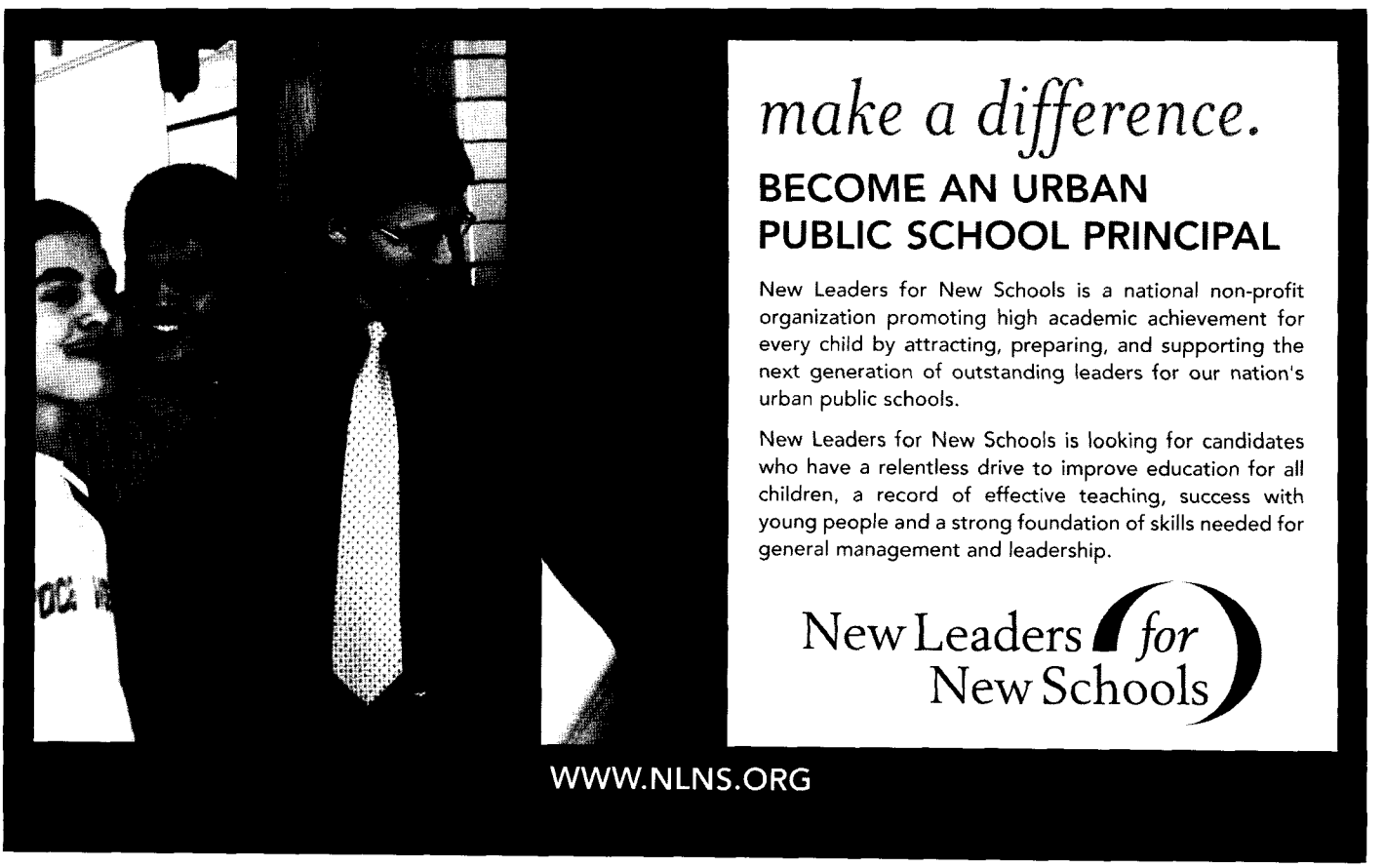
Because of such concerns, I'm against pushing for mandatory national standards and assessments. Instead, I propose a more incremental approach, one that tries to create greater rigor within our current state-based systems, without ripping them up root and branch.

Specifically, I suggest adding NAEP performance as a factor in determining the allocation of federal funds. For example, if a district makes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on low state standards (relative to NAEP), it may lose some federal money or be ineligible for certain grant funds, even though it is not technically "in need of improvement" under NCLB.

To support this new system, DOE should fund the development of more-detailed curriculum frameworks (perhaps several different alternatives) and a national test-item bank for interim and annual assessments, all aligned to NAEP standards. States would be free to choose among these frameworks or stick with their own homegrown versions.

This approach might lead to more consistent standards over time, but it would do so gradually through incentives, rather than quickly through compulsion. It would also avoid (I hope) a distracting and potentially damaging political food fight on the nationalization of education standards. Instead of devoting scarce time, energy, and money to this sort of risky venture, I would prefer to expend these resources on developing effective strategies for turning around failing schools, accelerating the pace of new-school creation and replication, deepening the educator talent pool, and broadening parental choice.

James Peyser is a partner with NewSchools Venture Fund and chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education.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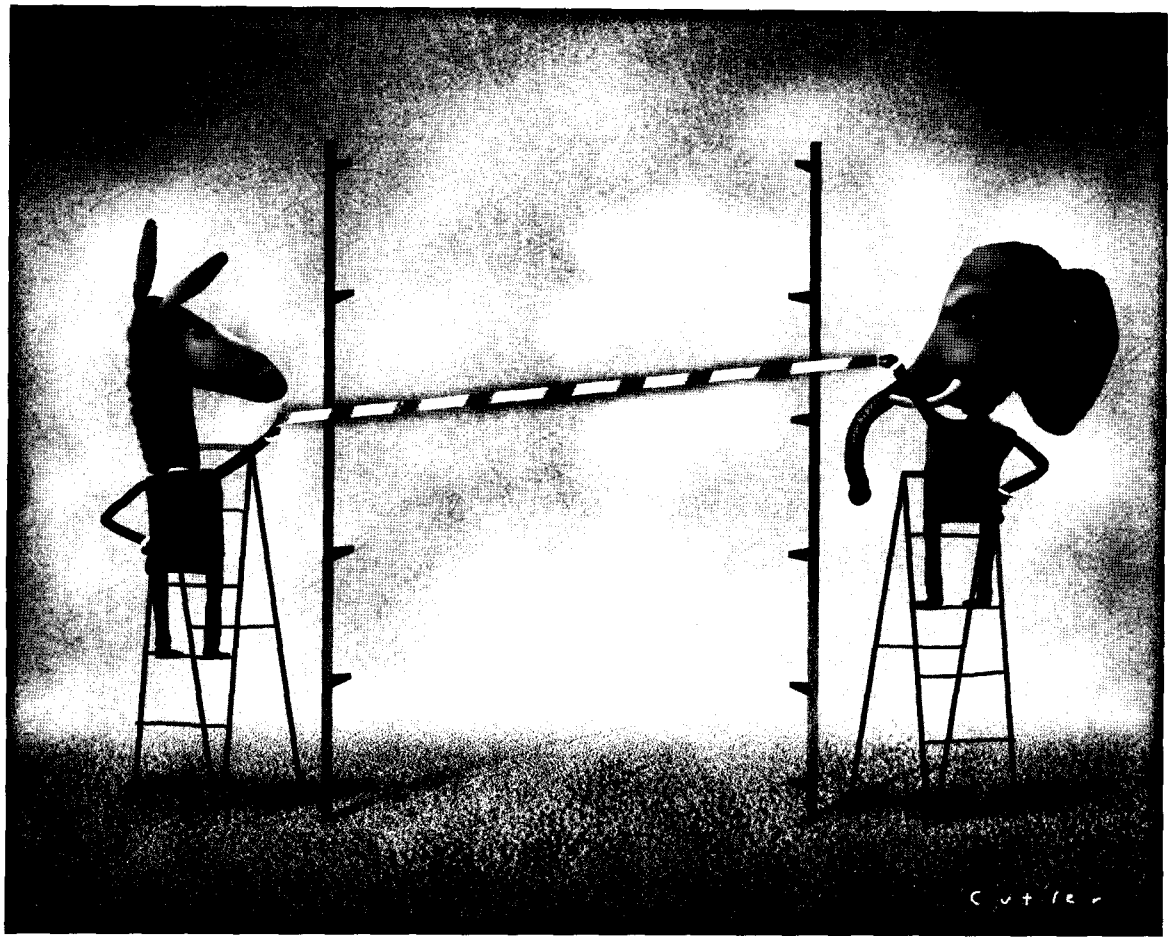
Political Realities

To get national standards, leaders will need to be bold



Wonks love national standards. Politicians don't.

Wonks love national standards for solving wonky problems, like the downward pressure on standards and the incomparability of states' test results under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Wonks love the frisson of danger from embracing an idea that their ideological allies don't like, whether they are conservatives committed to states' rights or liberals troubled by inflexible standards. Finally, wonks love the fact that every past effort to establish national standards has crashed and burned. The implausibility is testimony to their (well, our) purity of heart.

Politicians are less interested in purity than in popularity. And they know recent history. When Bill Clinton proposed voluntary national testing in 1997, he drew opposition from both ends of the political spectrum, including the Eagle Forum, the Christian Coalition, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the National Education Association. Who can blame him for folding his cards? There is not a leader in Washington eager to go up against that diverse crowd.

BY ROBERT GORDON

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Yet a few years later, a standards-based accountability system became the core component of NCLB. That law put standards and accountability at the center of education nationwide, even as it left the determination of standards to the discretion of the states. In important ways, NCLB made standards advocates victims of their own success. They won passage of the law by painting a sunny picture of a standards-based future, but at least for the moment, reality is cloudier. At a time when many activists are agitating to cut back the role of Washington in education, a politician aiming to expand it with national standards could seem naive or stupid.

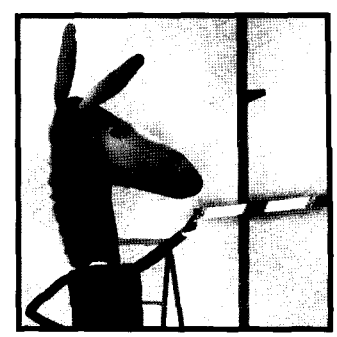
An Entry Strategy

There is a way forward, however. Politicians are already taking modest steps toward national standards without creating a firestorm. Consider the recent work of the country's governors. Although in principle they should be eager to defend state prerogatives, governors do not live in principle. They have to get the job done. Last year, at their national summit, 16 governors agreed to work with Achieve, Inc., a national nonprofit organization, on setting lofty standards for high-school graduation, increasing the rigor of high-school curricula and tests, and aligning standards and tests with the demands of work and college. Now 22 governors are involved. These states have begun quietly combining efforts and borrowing from each other. State pride is a reason to root for State U., not to waste scarce state money.

While the Achieve approach does not yet apply to earlier grades, quiet congressional action could. The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind will contain countless provisions initially known only to Hill staffers and lobbyists. Opponents of national standards can try to stir their armies over issues both large and small, but that may prove difficult if the proposals are framed in sufficiently sensible but obscure ways. For example, Massachusetts senator Ted Kennedy recently introduced legislation that would require national rankings of state standards and assessments against the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). From the other side of the political spectrum, Harvard's Caroline Hoxby, a member of the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education, has also proposed benchmarking against NAEP, with the added wrinkle that states with tougher standards would receive extensions of the deadlines in NCLB.

Both approaches would lift standards and encourage national movement toward NAEP standards. Both also avoid the most controversial aspects of the Clinton efforts. Measures like those proposed by Kennedy and Hoxby don't turn the Department of Education into a standard-setting body (to be known to critics as a "national school board"), and they don't establish "national tests" beyond the highly respected ones we already have. It is difficult to see ordinary churchgoers and teachers mobilizing in protest against benchmarking, though tempests in the Hill teapot have begun over less.

As with Achieve's efforts, the features that make the Kennedy and Hoxby approaches more viable also restrain their impacts. These initiatives would, for example, limit national benchmarking to the three grades tested by NAEP. And they would leave in place the crazy quilt of state tests. Any proposal to take on those aspects of the status quo—to extend national testing, for example, and strongly push it on states—would meet fierce opposition.



At a time when many activists are agitating to cut back the role of Washington in education, a politician aiming to expand it with national standards could seem naive or stupid.

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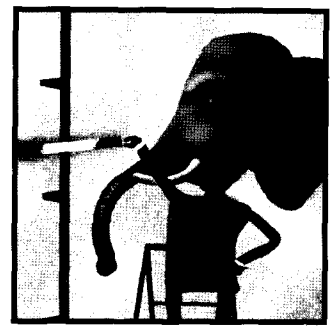
The Leadership Quotient

Yet it is wrong to imagine that the strange alliance that defeated standards in the nineties, from Phyllis Schlafly on the right to Maxine Waters on the left, would necessarily prevail in the new century. After all, most of the folks who opposed national standards also had grave misgivings about NCLB, but it became law. And it became law for one reason: a (then) popular president badly wanted it. That is no surprise. In America, presidents have unique power to initiate change. So the question is whether we can imagine leading national figures embracing national standards.

While political insiders often disparage national standards as a dry-as-dust technicality that won't interest voters, voters themselves may take a different view. They see the new global demands for skills; they want their kids to be ready; and they may well be happy to see Washington seize responsibility for that readiness. In 1996, 87 percent of Americans said they supported a nationwide academic examination for high-school graduation. The NCLB backlash has grown since it was signed into law in 2002, but many polls have remained surprisingly favorable. In early 2004, a National Education Association (NEA) poll showed substantial, though not majority, support for expanding the federal education role to include national standards. Another 2004 poll showed that 59 percent of Americans supported increased federal oversight of public schools.

Much as a Republican might make national standards more palatable to his base by linking them to school choice, a Democrat will want to link national standards to a greater commitment to funding the means to achieve them.



Yet good politicians don't choose policies based on polls. They choose policies that fit into their own larger vision for the country. National standards will only find political support if they fit into such a vision.

In theory, it's possible to imagine a Republican campaigning for national standards within a broadly conservative vision. In 2000, George W. Bush promoted education reform, including a strong federal role in education, as the best evidence of his "compassionate conservatism." A natural successor in time of war could be "national-greatness conservatism," first trumpeted in the *Wall Street Journal* nearly a decade ago by David Brooks and William Kristol.

Citing Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, Brooks and Kristol praised "limited but energetic" use of government in the service of American strength and individual initiative. At a time when America's achievement on international tests falls somewhere between Cyprus and Hungary, it is possible to imagine an articulate conservative who demands that every red-blooded American pass a test as tough as France's. The blow to states-rights principles from national standards could be softened with pledges to block-grant federal education spending and encourage competition through charter schools or school vouchers, along the lines described in the contribution from Chester Finn and Michael Petrilli in this issue (see "A New New Federalism," p. 48). The business community, always friendly to national standards, would gobble it up. Of greater interest, some minority voters with kids in lousy schools might do the same.

In theory, Arizona senator John McCain could take this line. So too could Governor Mitt Romney, touting his own Massachusetts miracle of rising test scores and a tough graduation exam. But there is an enormous problem. The Republican base, so critical to the nominating process and so committed to local control, would hate it. In 2000, social conservatives accepted Bush's ambitious education agenda because they wanted to win. Four years earlier, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole had pledged to abolish the Education Department, but in polls, voters said they preferred Clinton's ambitious federal education agenda to Dole's plan by a margin of 30 percentage points. Four years later, with education near the top of voters' agendas in 2000, social conservatives calculated that they could live with their

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nominee offering an ambitious federal plan of his own. And it was a smart calculation. As recounted in a new book on NCLB by Drew University political science professor Patrick McGuinn (*No Child Left Behind and the Transformation of Federal Education Policy, 1965–2005*), GOP pollster David Winston attributes Bush's 2000 victory to his education agenda.

In 2008 it will be difficult for a Republican to make the case that electoral necessity requires a strong education agenda, much less national standards. Education has dropped as a public concern. The president's success in reasserting a serious Republican claim to education means that for all of his party's problems, lack of concern for schooling isn't among them today. And no longer starved for power, the Republican base today seeks to return to first principles, which for them are not Lincoln and Roosevelt's, but Goldwater and Reagan's. That is why leading Republican candidates for president like Virginia senator George Allen now pepper their speeches with potshots at "federal education bureaucrats." And at a time when frontrunner John McCain is courting the religious right, he seems as likely to support home schooling as national standards.

Between a Rock and National Standards

Democrats have their own difficulties but should have an easier time. When it comes to national standards, their problem hasn't been the "national," but the "standards." Civil rights groups have worried that minority students will not meet national standards in disproportionate numbers. And teacher organizations have never liked the idea of a government agency telling their members what to teach once the classroom door has closed. The lawsuits by the National Education Association and the bright-blue state of Connecticut show just how difficult it would be to unify the Democratic base around national standards.

But overcoming the opposition may not be as hard as it seems. Today, unlike in 1996, we already have the standards. And virtually all Democratic leaders have expressed their strong commitment to those standards. It is hard to go back.

More important, adding the "national" to the "standards" can become a vehicle for meeting many critics' concerns. Democrats can assail the waste and confusion that the current 50-state, 50-test regime has created. Never shy about finding fault with corporate malefactors, they can attack the testing companies that make millions from the new status quo. In language their union supporters will appreciate, they can also criticize the current tests and pledge funding for the development of superior, sophisticated exams that measure higher-level thinking skills. National standards can become the basis both to critique the status quo and to fix it. It is not difficult to imagine a Democratic nominee making exactly this argument.

Democrats can make such claims because they have nothing against the federal government in theory, however much state and local school officials have been complaining about NCLB in practice. In fact, Democrats have long believed in vigorous use of national power to ensure greater attention to forgotten children. The argument for national standards parallels the historical argument for federal action to desegregate schools or to serve children with disabilities. In principle, states could be achieving these goals; in reality, they aren't. That is why a federal commitment matters. And that is why civil rights groups are now more supportive of accountability than they were a decade ago, as the recent intervention of the Connecticut chapter of the NAACP against that state's lawsuit demonstrates.

Standards con Brio

Much as a Republican might make national standards more palatable to his base by linking them to school choice, a Democrat will want to link national standards to a greater commitment to funding the means to achieve them. During the 1990s, the policy term was "opportunity to learn standards"; the political formula was that "spending without accountability is a waste of money, and accountability without spending is a waste of time." That formula still works, in policy and in politics. So Democrats could promote reforms in education financing. Title I has ameliorated some interdistrict funding gaps, but recent research has revealed vast gaps both within districts, owing in part to the loopholes in Title I's comparability requirement, and among states, resulting from states' different resources and levels of effort. Today, a Democratic candidate could bring together the party's wings by calling for a national commitment to high standards and the resources to meet them.

To be sure, putting national standards on the national agenda is one thing; making them law is another. A Republican president will have difficulty getting his party to put up the dollars or concede local control to the federal government. A Democrat will have to persuade union leaders to live with more serious standards in exchange for more money. But a new president from either party can move the agenda forward. Much will take place—within the National Governors' Association or a House-Senate conference committee, for example. But it will require a national leader's embrace for the biggest changes to happen. When a politician supports national standards with as much gusto as we wonks do, national standards will stand a fighting chance.

Robert Gordon works for the New York City Department of Education and is a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He worked for John Kerry and John Edwards on education issues during the 2004 presidential campaign. The views expressed are his own.

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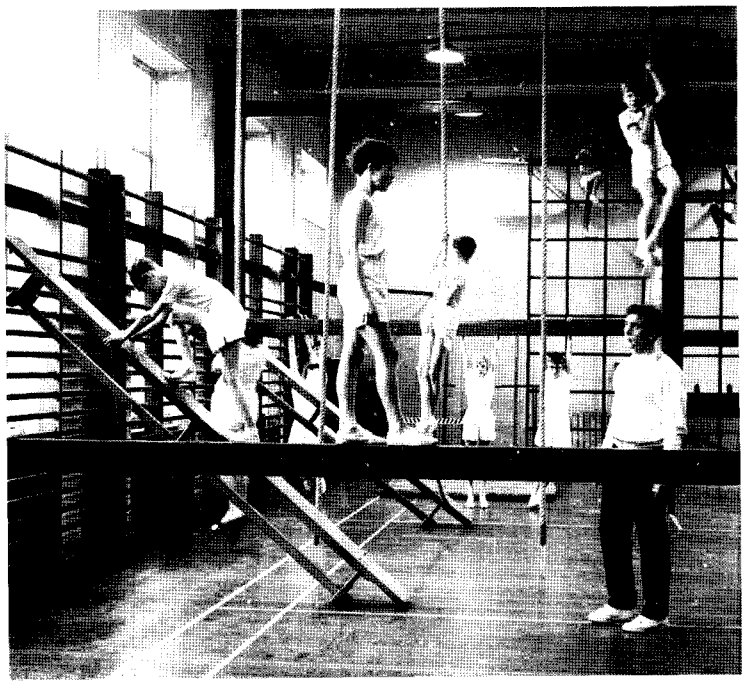
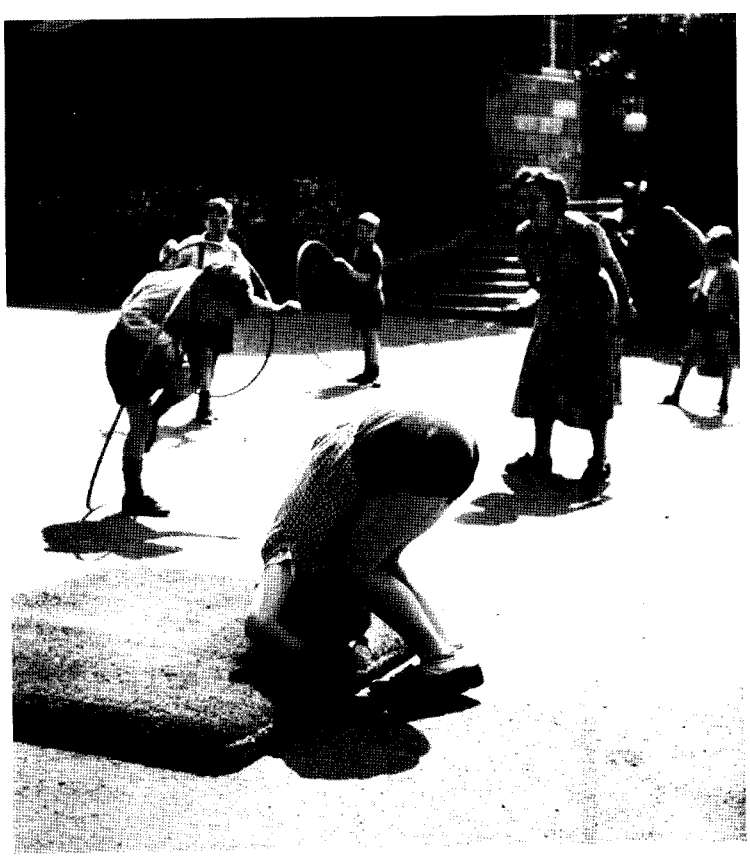


Not Your Father's PE



Obesity, exercise, and the role of schools

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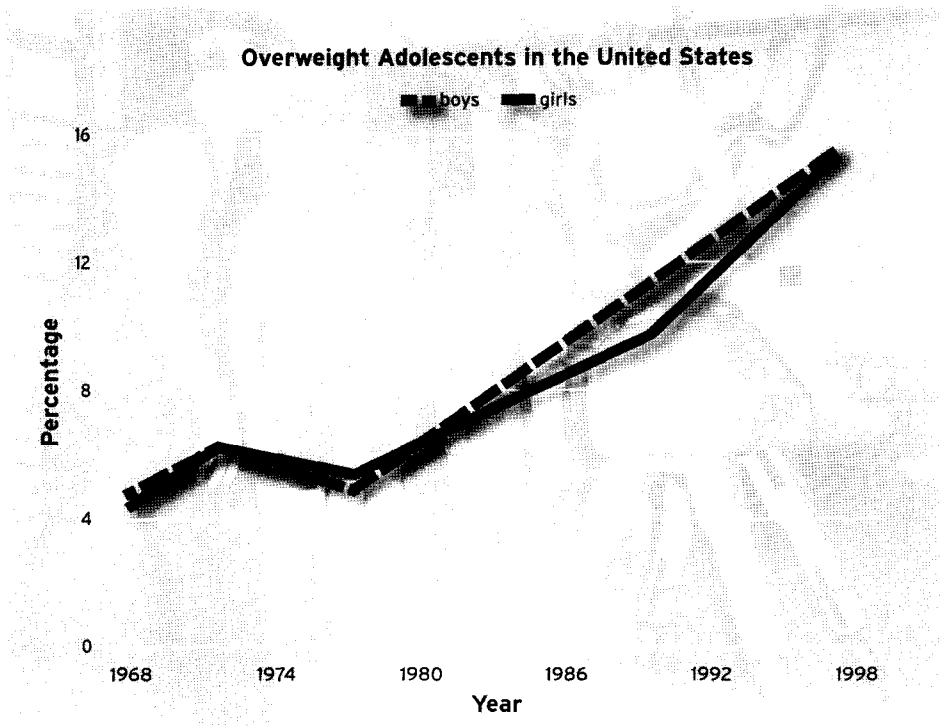
Growing Out While Growing Up (Figure 1)

The percentage of America's adolescents who are overweight has more than tripled since the late 1960s.



Note: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an "overweight" individual has a body mass index (BMI) at or above the 95th percentile of the CDC's sex-specific BMI growth chart. The point estimates on the graph are the result of surveys administered over the following periods: 1966-70, 1971-74, 1976-80, 1988-94, and 1999-2000.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "Health, United States, 2003"

American children are gaining weight at an alarming rate. Since the 1960s, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the percentage of American six- to eleven-year-olds who fall into the CDC's highest weight classification for children has almost quadrupled. The fraction of adolescents in this category, called "overweight" by CDC rather than "obese" in an attempt to avoid stigmatizing children, has skyrocketed from 4.5 percent to 15.5 percent (see Figure 1).

What may not be as well known is that physical education (PE) requirements in schools have been shrinking at the same time that the waistlines of America's school children have been expanding. From 1991 to 2003, the percentage of high-school students enrolled in daily PE classes in America plummeted, from 42 percent to 28 percent. Sounds like simple math: less time in gym class plus increasingly easy access to snack food and soda in school equals more youth obesity.

The solution seems straightforward. Medical, public health, and education organizations, including the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the American Academy of Pediatrics have all called for students to spend more time in PE classes. In 2005 alone, legislatures in 44 states introduced bills to increase or reform school physical education. Alabama proposed hiring an additional 289 PE teachers in each of the subsequent 2 years. Kentucky, like several other states, would require 30 minutes of PE a day for its students. Maryland decided to hire a full-time state director of physical education.

Jumping through Hoops and Caveats

Requiring more PE seems like a logical response to the childhood obesity epidemic, but will mandating more time in

PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

BY JOHN CAWLEY, CHAD MEYERHOEFER, AND DAVID NEWHOUSE

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gym classes actually result in more exercise for kids? Will it help them lose weight? Surprisingly, studying the relationships between PE classes and actual physical activity presents some research challenges, as does judging the connections between PE and student weight.

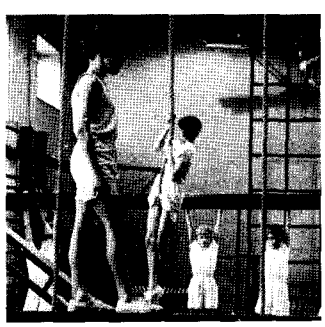
To begin, requiring more PE does not mean that students actually spend more time in the gym. According to a 2000 study by sports researchers Ken Hardman and Joe Marshall, an estimated 26 percent of PE classes in the United States today fail to comply with state regulations. And even when schools do play by the rules, gym classes may do little to promote exercise. The U.S. Department of Education has criticized PE for too often consisting of "roll out the balls and let them play," unstructured and unmotivated class time involving little vigorous activity. One study of a county in Texas found that elementary-school students are vigorously active only 3 minutes and 24 seconds per 40-minute PE class. (See "Don't Sweat It," *features*, p. 30.)

Even that may exaggerate the impact of a physical education program, as students may circumvent the best intentions of state lawmakers. PE classes may generate an increase in exercise at the moment the class is held, for instance, but students may decide to exercise less at other times during the school week. And even if overall exercise levels jump upward, that will not lead to weight loss if students increase their caloric consumption. Evaluations of innovative PE curricula designed to encourage exercise suggest that PE classes do increase physical activity but have no noticeable effect on student weight. Still, relatively little research has systematically examined how much PE (as it is currently constituted) contributes to weight loss or lowers the risk of obesity, and what little research there is finds no association between PE and weight loss and obesity.

To investigate the matter further, we examined how differences in state requirements for PE affect the amount of time students spend exercising in PE class. Then we looked at how much that increase in PE exercise time affects the levels of overall physical activity and the weight of high-school students. Our results in a nutshell: when states raise their PE requirements, girls become more active, as indicated by their reports of the total number of minutes per week they say they are exercising vigorously. There is no similar effect on boys.

When it comes to less-vigorous physical activity, however, increased PE exercise actually *decreases* the number of days in which girls report light physical activity. Apparently, when girls exercise in class, they become more sedentary during the discretionary hours of their week. Unfortunately, this propensity occurs predominantly among girls who are less active in the first place. Perhaps because PE has so little impact on physical activity, we found little effect on weight loss or the likelihood of obesity, as measured by the BMI, which is derived by dividing weight (in kilograms) by height (in meters) squared. The only suggestion of an effect is among the most-sedentary girls, and the evidence there is weak at best.

Those are the main findings. To obtain them was more complicated than it might seem, simply because studying the relationships between PE, physical activity, and weight is complex. Students can be thin, active, and engaged in their physical education, but figuring out which of these attributes came first is another matter. Or students can be couch potatoes, overweight, and laggards in the gym, but exactly what caused the obesity may be quite unclear. If physically active students of healthy weight enjoy PE and elect to take extra PE classes, we will likely find a correlation between PE and healthy weight, even if extra PE has no impact on weight. Similarly, if the school offers more, and higher-quality, PE classes, and if the students living in those districts come from advantaged homes and are healthier as a result,



PE classes may generate an increase in exercise at the moment the class is held, but students may decide to exercise less at other times during the week.

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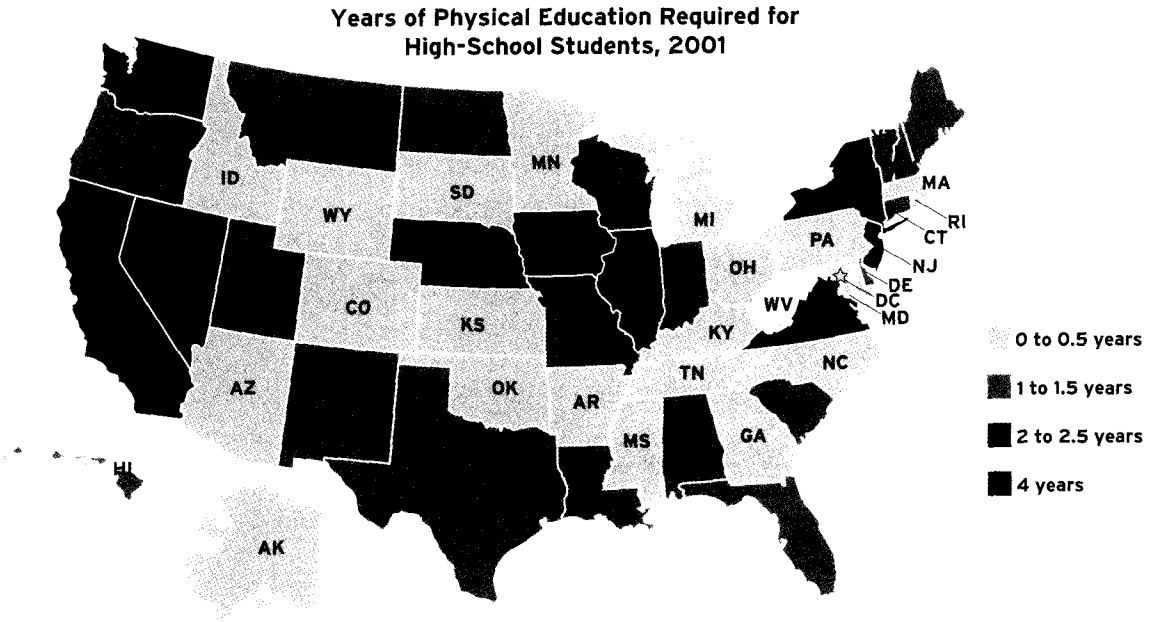
Regulating Exercise (Figure 2)

Different states, distinctive mandates.



Note: The physical education requirement data are normalized to reflect years of instruction, and requirements corresponding to health education are excluded.

SOURCE: National Association for Sport and Physical Education, "Shape of the Nation Report," 2001

then one could find, once again, a correlation between PE and healthy weight.

One can try to get around these problems by looking at changes in school or district physical-education requirements. But once again, one could be led astray by any simple analysis that ignores the possibility that schools and districts raise PE requirements in response to high obesity rates. Unless one took this possibility into account, tougher PE rules would appear to make students gain weight.

Making the Target Stand Still

We address these research problems by using a measure of PE time that is beyond the control of students and individual districts and schools: state laws that mandate minimal PE requirements. Information on state laws was gathered from "The Shape of the Nation Report" (SONR), a 2001 survey of all states and the District of Columbia conducted by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education. The purpose of SONR was to document the state mandates for, and availability of, physical education programs at each school level in every state. Only about 40 percent of the states have a requirement stated in minutes of PE instruction. Among those that do, the average requirement is slightly over 40 minutes per day. Other states have unit or credit requirements that mandate a certain amount of coursework in PE, but the number of "course minutes" equating to a unit of instruction varies. We standardized the data so that one unit of PE has the same meaning across states. After standardization, the amount of PE required by state varied from 0 (no requirement) to 4 years in half-year increments (see Figure 2).

Next, we used the standardized units to study the link between the amount of time children spend exercising in PE class and their overall activity levels and weight. We obtained information on student physical activity and weight by taking advantage of the student data available from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a nationally representative survey of high-school students (grades 9–12) that was established by the CDC to monitor the prevalence of risky

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youth behaviors, including those relating to physical activity and obesity. The YRBSS has been conducted biennially since 1991. We combined the YRBSS data from the 1999, 2001, and 2003 surveys, the years for which the study asked about weight and height. The result is a sample of almost 37,000 high school students containing information on PE time, exercise, height, and weight.

The YRBSS asks students two questions about PE: the number of days per week that the student has PE class and the number of minutes per class that the child is actually engaged in sports or other exercise. Since the latter question asks students to report minutes in one of several intervals, we multiply the number of days per week the student has PE class by the midpoint of the interval to calculate the total active time in PE class per week. (We also recalculated active PE time per week using the lowest number of minutes in each interval instead of the midpoint. This change did not affect our findings on physical activity or weight.)

In general, estimated active time in PE class is low, with an average reported level of 16 minutes per day and only 2 minutes per day for the median student. Median active time is low because many school districts only require PE for one or two years of high school, many schools offer PE class fewer than five days per week, and many PE classes fail to provide much actual exercise.

Our three measures of physical activity are those chosen by the CDC to monitor progress toward the goals of their Healthy People 2010 campaign. The YRBSS asks how many days out of the past seven respondents participated in three different types of exercise: 1) at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise (activities that made the student sweat or breathe hard); 2) at least 30 minutes of light activity; and 3) strength-building exercise (no minimum number of minutes). These questions cover all exercise and activity, whether in or out of PE class; as a result, we measure the impact of PE on total activity.

We study two outcomes concerning student weight: BMI and whether or not the student is classified by the CDC, according to their BMI, as obese.

When dealing with self-reported data, there is always the risk that survey respondents will misreport, accidentally or intentionally. To determine the extent of reporting error in weight among high-school students, researchers at the CDC surveyed high-school students and collected data on both self-reported and measured weight and height. They found that self-reported values of height and weight were highly correlated with their measured values (0.90 and 0.93, respectively), but students did tend to overreport their height and underreport their weight. The average student overreported height by 2.7 inches and underreported weight by 3.5 pounds, resulting in an underreported BMI of 2.6 units. However, this tendency to underreport will only disguise a true effect of PE on weight if students who live in states with lower PE requirements underreport their weight by a larger amount. Since there is no reason to believe that, we consider the self-reports to be acceptably accurate measures of student height and weight.

A limitation of the YRBSS data is that we are unable to separate private school from public school students. This is relevant because public schools are legally bound to comply with state regulations concerning physical education, but private schools are not. However, it should be kept in mind that 90 percent of all students in the United States attend public schools.

Asking the Right Questions

We pursued three main lines of inquiry in order to find out what happens when states require students to spend more class time in the school gym or on the athletic fields:

1. Do students living in states with higher PE credit requirements spend more time physically active in PE class than those living in states with lower PE credit requirements?

2. Does this additional active PE time improve overall levels of physical activity?

3. Does this additional active PE time lead to lower weight, as measured by BMI?

To measure the impact of state-mandated PE requirements, we compared the self-reported PE activity times, overall physical activity levels, and BMI of students who are subject to state PE requirements. We also accounted for the students' age, gender, and race/ethnicity, as well as the region in which they live, in order to isolate the effect of PE requirements from other factors that may be correlated with activity, body weight, and obesity.

Since states choose their PE policies, it is possible that those with high rates of youth obesity enact higher PE requirements. If this were the case, we would actually see a positive relationship between PE requirements and BMI. In an effort to identify this relationship if it did occur, we account for the prevalence of obesity in the state among adults.

We also address the concern that we will see a false negative relationship between PE and weight if wealthier states have lower rates of obesity and higher PE requirements. To account for the possible influence of state socioeconomic status, we control for state per capita income, the percentage of the state population with a bachelor's degree or higher, and the percentage of the state's children participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). We also include two additional, more-focused measures of the resources made available for education in a state: average teacher salary and average pupil-teacher ratio.

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More PE time = More exercise. Maybe.

When an additional unit of PE is required, which translates roughly into an extra 200 minutes per week, boys report they spend 7.6 minutes more per week actually exercising or playing sports in gym class. However, that additional time spent exercising in school did not result in clear improvements in students' overall levels of physical activity. Boys report no increase in the number of days they engaged in vigorous, light, or strength-training exercise.

The effect of increasing PE requirements on girls is slightly larger; requiring an additional unit adds 8 minutes and 6 seconds per week of exercise in PE. One possible explanation for the gender difference is that girls are less likely to take PE as an elective, so their amount of PE time is more readily affected by minimum course requirements. That additional 8 minutes and 6 seconds in active PE time seems to have some more general payoff, even when one takes into account what happens outside school, as it results in a small increase in the number of days per week girls report they are engaged in vigorous exercise.

When additional PE is required, boys report no increase in the number of days they engaged in exercise. Girls report a small increase in the number of days they are engaged in vigorous exercise.

An extra 100 minutes of active PE time raises the number of days with vigorous exercise reported by girls by 1.2 days. Put another way, for girls to spend an additional day with at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise requires an extra 83 minutes of active PE time per week, or roughly 17 minutes per school day. This 17 minutes is not simply extra PE class time; it's extra PE class time *spent being physically active.*

However, these positive impacts are accompanied by offsetting effects. An extra 100 minutes of PE exercise per week causes a *decrease* of 0.75 days with light activity among girls. In other words, one *less* day with light activity is reported for every 133 additional minutes of PE exercise (or 27 additional minutes of PE exercise per school day). There appears to be no effect of additional active PE time on frequency of strength-training activity among girls.

The reason for the reduction in light activity days among girls? We suspect that girls may be offsetting the additional amount of PE exercise by decreasing physical activity outside of class. Girls may have a target amount of time they wish to spend physically active. If they are required to spend more time exercising in PE, they may respond by cutting back on discretionary light activities outside of school.

It is not clear, however, why this substitution exists only for light activity and not for vigorous exercise or strength-building activities. Perhaps this pattern of behavior is a result of different effects of state requirements on physically active girls as compared to their relatively sedentary classmates.

We identified the sedentary and more-active girls by turning to the YRBSS question that asked each student whether they participate in team sports. While this is not a perfect measure of a girl's tendency to be active, we consider it to be at least a rough indicator. Consistent with our expectations, offsetting behavior is evident only for girls who do not play team sports. Among these girls, an extra 100 minutes of active PE time results in 1.6 fewer days with light exercise.

All this still leaves us wondering why PE requirements make a difference for the more-vigorous physical activity for girls but not for boys. Just as minimum PE requirements may have different effects on students with different initial overall activity levels, additional PE may affect girls more than boys because girls on average engage in less strenuous exercise and fewer strength-building activities than boys. For example, the average number of days per week with vigorous exercise is 3.0 for girls and 4.2 for boys. The average number of days with strength-building activity is 2.4 for girls and 3.5 for boys. This difference in overall activity levels means that the same amount of PE time represents a bigger fraction of girls' total physical activity.

Overall, the evidence on whether exercise in PE promotes exercise for girls is mixed. When required by state law to attend

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Our results cast doubt on the effectiveness of education reforms that merely increase the time spent suited up for gym class.

more gym classes, adolescent girls, unlike their male counterparts, do engage in vigorous physical activity more often, but engage in light exercise less.

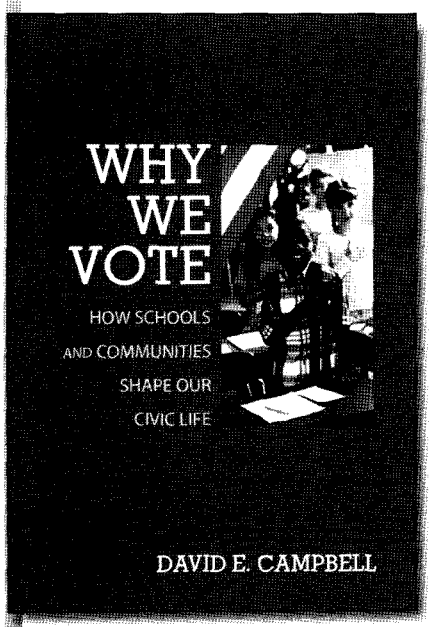
Quantity and Quality

The results of our study suggest that the effect of increased state PE requirements is mixed at best. Although we found no effect on boys' overall physical activity or weight, increased active PE time does raise the number of days that girls report at least 20 minutes of vigorous exercise. The improvement for girls is important because these types of exercise have significant health benefits, even aside from weight loss. Yet the positive effect on girls' behavior is tempered by a decrease in the number of days girls engage in 30 minutes or more of light physical activity. This offsetting behavior is most prominent among girls who are not otherwise active in team sports. The results, combined with the lack of a clear effect of PE on BMI or obesity among adolescent youth, lead us to doubt the effectiveness of education reforms that merely target time spent suited up for gym class.

It is possible that some of the additional PE time that students classified as devoted to exercise or sport was, in fact, relatively sedentary. If this is what explains the lack of association between active PE time and most measures of physical activity and obesity among boys and girls, then improvements to the PE curriculum should precede mandated increases in PE time. Some of the organizations that have called for more PE time qualified their recommendation by stating that there should be an increase in "quality" PE, in addition to more time in PE, but as yet there is no agreed-upon, scientifically determined "ideal" PE curriculum.

Even if PE curricula are strengthened to include more vigorous exercise, the effects will be reduced if students become more sedentary during their discretionary time, the net effect being that weight may remain unaffected. Public health officials and educators should consider ways to reduce or eliminate such offsetting behavior.

John Cawley is an associate professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management at Cornell University and a faculty research fellow of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Chad Meyerhoefer is an economist at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. David Newhouse is a technical assistance advisor at the International Monetary Fund. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and no official endorsement by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Department of Health and Human Services, International Monetary Fund, or Cornell University is intended or should be inferred.



Why We Vote
How Schools and Communities Shape Our Civic Life
DAVID E. CAMPBELL

Why We Vote demonstrates that our communities shape our civic and political engagement, and that schools are especially significant communities for fostering strong civic norms. David E. Campbell maintains that a sense of civic duty springs not only from one's current social environment, but also from one's early influences. The degree to which people feel a sense of civic obligation stems, in part, from their adolescent experience. Being raised and thus socialized in a community with strong civic norms leads people to be civically engaged in adulthood. Campbell demonstrates how the civic norms within one's high school impact individuals' civic involvement—even a decade and a half after those individuals have graduated.

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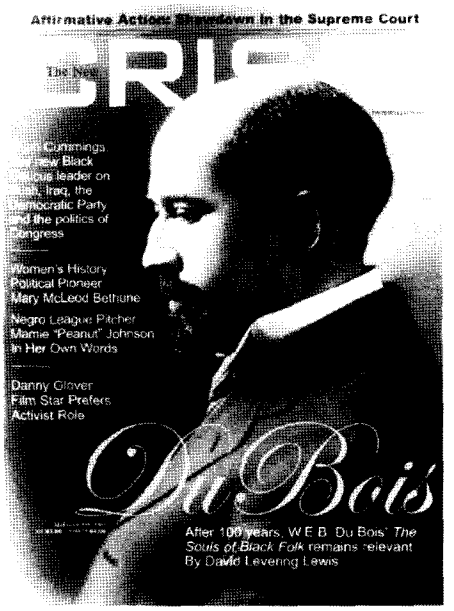

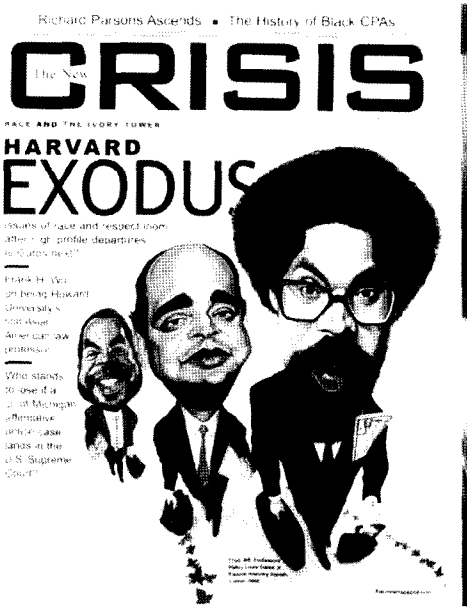

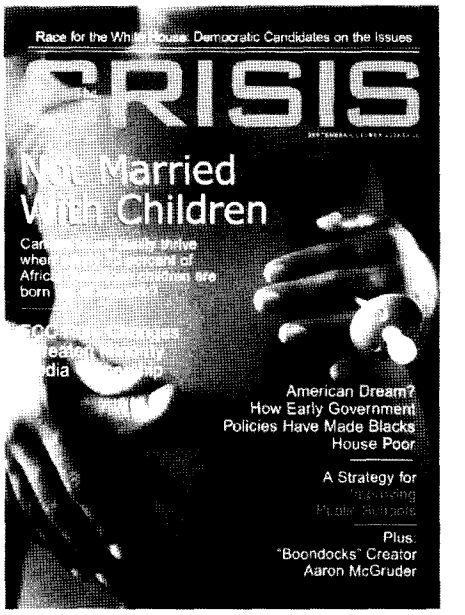

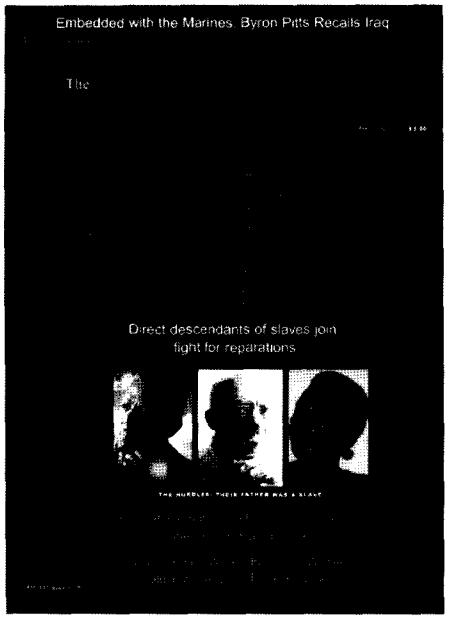

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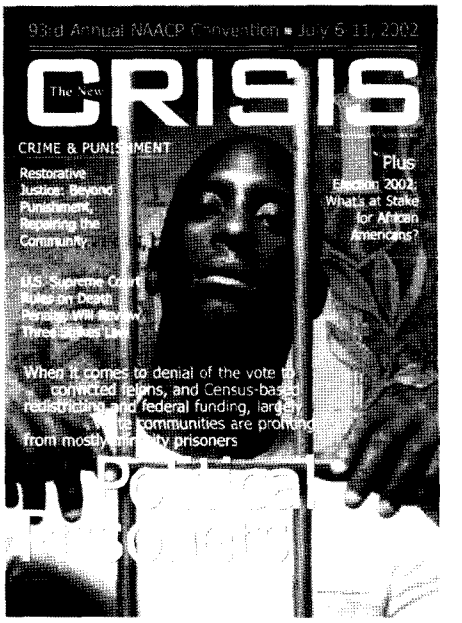

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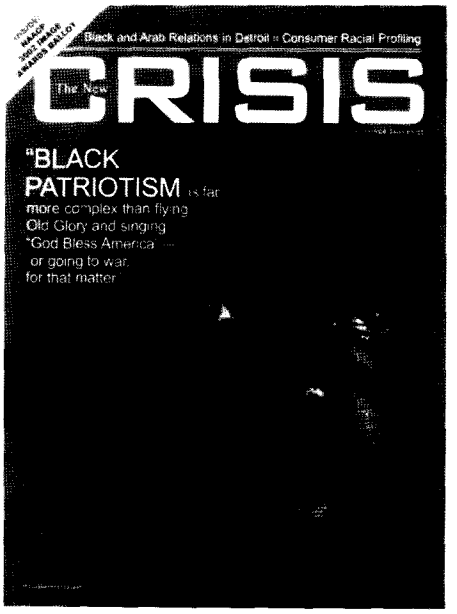

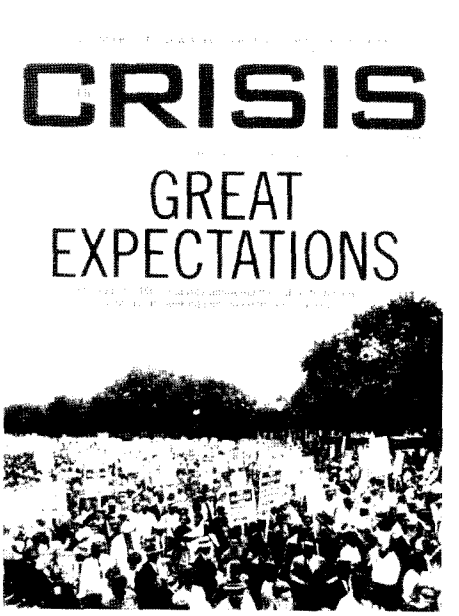

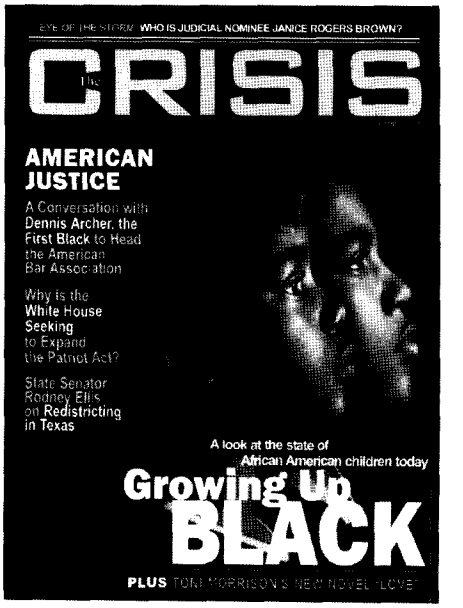

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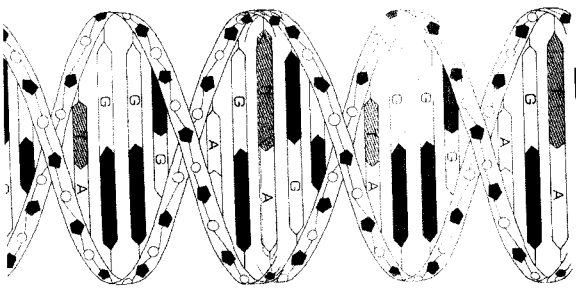

The Why

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How a Teacher's Gender Affects Boys and Girls

Chromosome

Gender gaps in educational outcomes are a matter of real and growing concern. We've known for a long time, since the 1970s, that girls outscore boys in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading tests, while boys tend to outperform girls in math and science.

Boys are increasingly less likely than girls to attend college and to receive a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, female college students continue to be underrepresented in such technical fields as engineering and computer science.

One popular, if controversial, response to these patterns has been a renewed push for single-sex education—an effort that has drawn support from across political divides. An amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act authorizing the creation of single-sex public schools was sponsored by Republican senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson of Texas, but the measure passed in large part due to the support of Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, a Wellesley College graduate grateful for her opportunity to attend one of the country's premier women's colleges. ("Wellesley nurtured, challenged, and guided me," she declared in her 1992 Commencement Day speech.) The National Association for Single-Sex Public Education reports that, as of April 2006, at least 223 public schools in the United States were offering gender-separate educational opportunities, up from just 4 in 1998. Although most were coeducational schools with single-sex classrooms, 44 were wholly single-sex.

PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

BY THOMAS S. DEE

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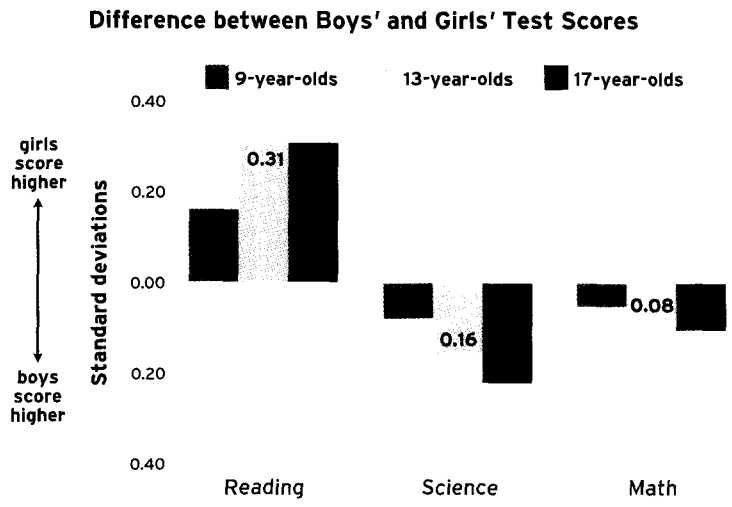
Gender Gap (Figure 1)

On a national assessment, boys score higher in math and science, while girls score higher in reading. The difference in reading, 0.3 standard deviations, is equivalent to approximately one grade level.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP 1999 Long-Term Trend Summary Data Tables

The majority of arguments for single-sex schools and classrooms focus on the effects on interactions among students, but they also present the possibility of greatly increasing the number of students with teachers of the same gender. Is there any convincing evidence that doing so could make a difference in education—for boys and girls alike? So far the jury has been out, but my analysis of national survey and test-score data collected by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) allows me to offer new and convincing evidence of the differential impact of a teacher's gender on student learning.

The Gender Gap

The evolution of the gender gaps in achievement as children mature suggests that what occurs in schools and classrooms may play an important role. According to the Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, when children enter kindergarten, the two genders perform similarly on tests of both reading and mathematics. But a few years later, by the spring of the 3rd grade, boys, on average, outperform girls in math and science, while the girls outperform the boys in reading. Disconcertingly, NAEP results show that for children between the ages of 9 and 13, the gender gaps in science and reading roughly double and the math gap increases by two-thirds. For children between the ages of 13 and 17, there is modest growth in the math and reading gender gaps but a substantial expansion of the gap in science (see Figure 1).

The gender gaps in achievement as students finish high school are far from trivial. In reading, 17-year-old boys score 31 percent of a standard deviation below 17-year-old girls, a deficit equal to about one grade level. This is nearly half the size of the black-white test-score gap in reading. In science and math, meanwhile, girls of that age score 22 percent and 10 percent of a standard deviation lower, respectively, also a difference worthy of concern.

Drowned out by the din of public argument over the role of nature vs. nurture is a debate, far from settled, over exactly how the experience of going to school shapes learning among boys and girls. One school of thought contends that teachers, both men and women, treat boys and girls differently in the classroom. For example, some controversial evidence, based on classroom observations, suggests that both are likely to offer praise and remediation in response to comments by boys but mere acknowledgment to comments by girls. Some cognitive scientists suggest that teachers may subtly communicate different academic expectations of boys and girls and these biased expectations may become self-fulfilling.

Teacher Gender Matters

Other theories, of special interest here, suggest that much depends on the gender of the teacher. One theory asserts that the teacher's gender shapes communications between teacher and pupil, while another says the teacher acts as a gender-specific role model, regardless of what he or she says or does. According to this second theory, students are more engaged, behave more appropriately, and perform at a higher level when taught by one who shares their gender.

Tests of these theories have relied primarily on information about teachers and students in college and graduate school. Findings have been mixed, so the issue remains unresolved. Studies have not focused on young adolescents, the time when students are particularly sensitive to gender differences and when gender gaps in achievement are pronounced.

I investigated the effect of a teacher's gender using the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS), which contains data on a nationally representative sample of nearly

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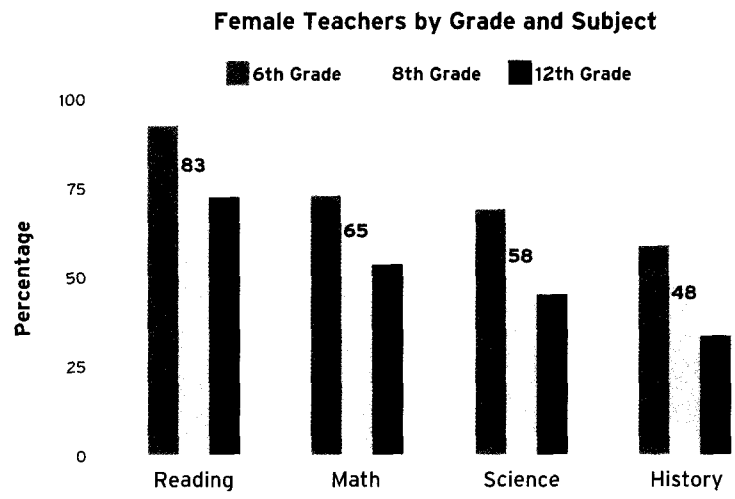
25,000 8th graders from 1988. In addition to examining the effect of teacher gender on students' test-score performance, I examined teacher perceptions of a student's performance and student perceptions of the subject taught by a particular teacher. I was especially interested in the influence of a teacher's gender on students' perceptions, because engagement with an academic subject may be an important precursor to subsequent achievement levels, course selection in high school and college, and also occupational choice. For example, the underrepresentation of women in fields like engineering and computer science may be due to levels of confidence and interest in related subjects in high school.

Indeed, my results confirm that a teacher's gender does have large effects on student test performance, teacher perceptions of students, and students' engagement with academic material. Simply put, girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men. These findings persist, even after I account for a variety of other characteristics of students, teachers, and classrooms that may influence student learning. They are especially important for young men when one considers that the percentage of 6th-grade teachers who were female ranged from 58 to 91 percent across four core subjects (math, science, reading, and history). Although these percentages decline in later grades, 83 percent of the English teachers in 8th grade are female, as are more than half of 8th-grade math and science teachers (see Figure 2).

The Gender of Teaching (Figure 2)

The percentage of teachers who are women remains high throughout the middle-school years, but drops in high school science and history, where teachers are more likely to be men.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Schools and Staffing Survey 1999–2000

A Mother Lode of Gender Data

Key to my findings is the National Education Longitudinal Survey, initiated in 1988 as a survey of a nationally representative sample of 8th-grade students from 1,052 public and private schools. The DOE resurveyed a sample of these students during four follow-up reviews, in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. For my study I rely only on the NELS data from 1988, which is based on surveys of 24,599 students and two of each student's teachers.

Simply put, girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women, and boys are better off when taught by men.

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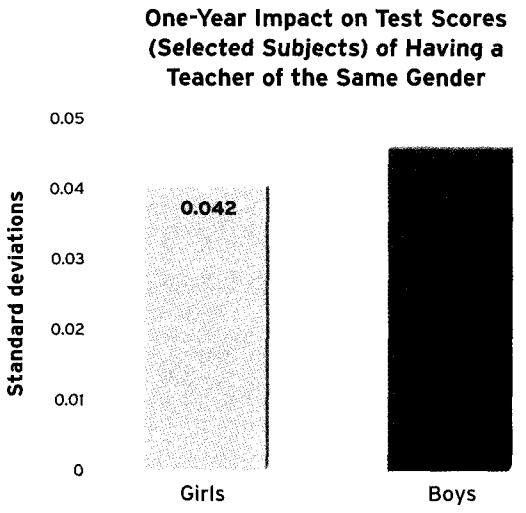
A Teacher Like Me (Figure 3)

When girls are taught by women and boys are taught by men, student achievement in science, English, and social studies increases for both groups.



Note: Effects are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Education Longitudinal Survey

In particular, I exploit a unique feature of the teacher surveys. For each sampled student, NELS administered questionnaires to teachers from *two* academic subjects: mathematics and English; mathematics and history; science and English; and science and history. Two completed teacher surveys are available for 21,324 of the 8th-grade students—a bit smaller than the full sample of NELS students because some teachers did not complete their questionnaires and some students did not have a class in one or both of the academic subjects randomly assigned to their school for which teacher surveys were administered.

The teacher survey solicited a variety of information about the teacher's background, including gender. It also included several questions about how the teacher viewed the behavior and performance of the specific students in the study. I was most interested in the effect of gender on three assessments that appear to be particularly good indicators of academic development. Teachers were asked to simply respond yes or no as to whether the student was frequently disruptive, consistently inattentive, or rarely completed homework.

The student component of NELS includes additional outcome data for the subjects taught by each sampled teacher, including the results from multiple-choice achievement tests. The survey also asked students questions about their engagement with the subject. In particular, students indicated whether they were afraid to ask questions in that subject, looked forward to their class, and saw the subject as useful for their future. NELS also solicited information about each student's gender as well as a variety of other demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

NELS is a goldmine of information for those interested in gender dynamics within the classroom. Especially noteworthy is the fact that data are available from the same student in two different subjects taken from two different teachers, which enables us to account for educationally relevant characteristics of students that cannot be ascertained by conventional background characteristics. In other words, these "matched-pairs" data allow us to see how the outcomes of the *same* student vary with two *different* teachers.

When estimating the effect of a teacher's gender, I use standard statistical techniques to adjust for the effect of several other teacher and classroom characteristics that may affect student outcomes. For example, I take into account whether the student shares the teacher's race and ethnicity, because some of my own prior research suggests that the race of a teacher may influence student outcomes (see "The Race Connection," *Education Next*, Spring 2004). I also consider the size of the class, the percentage of students in the classroom with limited English proficiency, the number of years a teacher has been working in the profession, and whether the teacher is state-certified in the subject he or she is teaching. What does this valuable set of data reveal about the connections between gender and learning?

The Most Important Findings

For three subject areas—science, social studies, and English—the overall effect of having a woman teacher instead of a man raises the achievement of girls by 4 percent of a standard deviation and lowers the achievement of boys by roughly the same amount, producing an overall gender gap of 8 percent of a standard deviation, no small matter if it can be assumed that this happened over the course of a single year. In fact, these estimates suggest that the effects of a year with a teacher of a particular gender are quite large relative to the gender gaps in achievement in the national datasets mentioned above. But I am hesitant to draw that conclusion in the absence of information about the gender of the teacher the student had in preceding years. Some of what I attribute to the 8th grade might have occurred in previous years, if the student had had multiple years of schooling from a teacher of the same gender.

While these results summarize the overall impact of teacher's gender on test scores, the effects vary somewhat from one subject to the next. Test-score benefits for girls of having a female teacher are concentrated in social studies. I estimate that a female social-studies teacher increases a girl's

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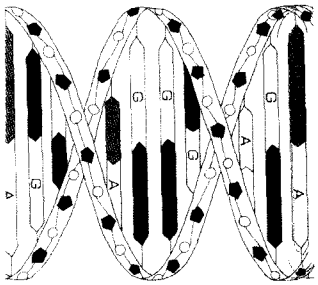
performance by 9 percent of a standard deviation. In contrast, the impact in English is not statistically significant. For boys, the largest effect appears in science. Their scores drop by 5 percent of a standard deviation if they have a female teacher. In English and social studies, the drops appear to be almost as large but are not statistically significant.

Regardless of the academic subject, boys are two to three times more likely than girls to be seen as disruptive, inattentive, and unlikely to complete their homework. However, how boys and girls view academic subjects varies across subjects in ways that parallel the gender gaps in subject test scores. For example, girls are more likely than boys to report



When a class is headed by a woman, boys are more likely to be seen as disruptive. When taught by a man, girls were more likely to report that they did not look forward to a subject.

It does not seem likely that one can explain these results by the quality of the student's teacher, because almost all teachers, whether men or women, are teaching boys and girls together. Yet the effect differs, depending on whether the genders of teacher and student match.

Still, to double-check this possibility, I isolate those situations where students of different genders had the same teacher. For the typical teacher who was surveyed by the NELS, there were three to four students included in the study. Given this information, I was able to re-estimate the effect of a teacher on students of the opposite gender, while adjusting for the overall effect of any individual teacher on student learning. In other words, because the *same* teacher is sometimes observed with sampled boys *and* girls, we can assess whether gender interactions matter after adjusting for the teacher's unobserved traits. The overall results—the average for the three subject areas—indicate an average positive impact on student achievement of 4 percent of a standard deviation whenever the teacher-student gender was the same (see Figure 3).

Classroom Dynamics

Exactly why gender makes so much of a difference in student learning is difficult to ascertain. But the NELS data offer some suggestive evidence that the opinions of teachers about their students—and of students about their teachers—is shaped in part by gender characteristics.

that they are afraid to ask questions in math, science, and social studies. They are also less likely to look forward to these classes or to see them as useful for their future. Meanwhile, boys, as compared to girls, register more negative perceptions of English classes.

But while boys and girls may exhibit different behaviors and prefer different subjects, that is not quite the same thing as having a different experience because of the gender of the teacher. So is there any evidence that teachers relate better to students whose gender they share—or vice versa? Significant patterns can be detected within the NELS data. When a class is headed by a woman, boys are more likely to be seen as disruptive, while girls are less likely to be seen as either disruptive or inattentive.

Furthermore, when taught by a man, girls were more likely to report that they did not look forward to a subject, that it was not useful for their future, or that they were afraid to ask questions. This dynamic is strongest in science, where student reports indicate that female science teachers are far more effective in promoting girls' engagement with this field of study. The estimated effects in the other two subjects pointed in the same direction but were statistically insignificant when examined separately.

Boys also had fewer positive reactions to their academic subject when taught by an opposite-gender teacher. In particular, when taught by a female teacher, boys were significantly more likely to report that they did not look forward to the subject. This effect appears to have been par-

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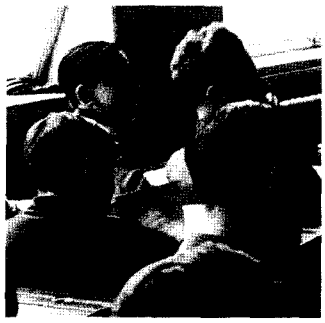

Adverse gender effects have an impact on both boys and girls, but that effect falls more heavily on the male half of the population in middle school, simply because most middle-school teachers are women.

ticularly pronounced when the female teacher was in history. The patterns for boys in other subjects are quite consistent with those observed in history, though I should again be cautious in drawing strong conclusions because many of the results fall short of conventional levels of statistical significance.

Math Results Unclear

Results in math differ strikingly from those in the other subject areas, but I place little weight on the findings in this area for reasons that require explanation. My initial analysis showed that both boys and girls suffered if they had a woman teacher. Both girls and boys scored 7 percent and 8 percent of a standard deviation lower, respectively, than if they had a man. But before rushing to the conclusion that math is a subject uniquely suited for male instruction, one needs to take into account other possible explanations.

I can rule out some obvious candidates. There is no evidence, for example, that female math teachers were given larger classes or were less likely to hold the proper subject-specific qualifications, such as proper state certification or a subject-specific degree at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

But I was concerned about the likelihood that women teachers are assigned the less-promising math students. Administrators may think that women are better equipped to handle more difficult students or that men are better able to challenge the bright ones. If so, then it could appear that students benefit less from women teachers simply because they are given the lower-achieving ones in the first place.

To check this out, I estimated the effect of having a female *math* teacher on students' *science* scores. This can be ascertained because students were tested in all four subjects, although only two of their teachers were surveyed. The reasoning behind this admittedly indirect test is that the gender of a student's math teacher should have relatively small effects on performance in science class taught by another teacher, especially in 8th grade, when science instruction usually does not have a significant mathematical component. If a student with a female math teacher also scores poorly in science, that would be a sign of a lower-performing student overall, not evidence that the gender of the teacher in the math class is having a negative impact.

And that is precisely what I found. The apparent impact of having a female math teacher on a girl's performance in science was a negative 4 percent of a standard deviation, a fairly large effect (though one that was only weakly significant from a statistical point of view). In fact, the apparent impact on science performance was two-thirds the size of the effect on math performance. That suggests that any estimates of the effect of teacher gender on girls' math achievement may well be biased by the fact that women are more likely to be assigned to lower-performing math students.

For that reason, and because I found no similar connections in other subject areas when I did the same kind of analysis, I excluded the math results from the main analysis reported above. Nor should it be particularly surprising that women are assigned lower-performing students in math, though that was not the case in other subjects.

In most middle schools, for most subjects, separating students by ability levels is the exception rather than the rule. But the one subject where it is most likely to happen is in fact math, where administrators may think that a certain level of accomplishment is necessary before algebra or some other advanced math material can be introduced. And when math classes are tracked, one can easily imagine that male teachers are more likely to be assigned to the advanced class. Thus, I place little weight on the math results that were observed.

If Not Single-Sex Schooling, Then What?

My results indicate that learning from a teacher of the opposite gender has a detrimental effect on students' academic progress and their engagement in school. My best estimate is that it lowers test scores for both boys and girls by approximately 4 percent of a standard deviation and has even

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larger effects on various measures of student engagement.

Adverse gender effects have an impact on both boys and girls, but that effect falls more heavily on the male half of the population in middle school, simply because most middle-school teachers are female. My estimates suggest that, if half of the English teachers in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades were male and their effects on learning were additive, the achievement gap in reading would fall by approximately a third by the end of middle school. Similarly, these results suggest that part of boys' relative propensity to be seen as disruptive in these grades is due to the gender interactions resulting from the preponderance of female teachers.

Unfortunately, in a coeducational setting, some of this gap closing would take place at the expense of the opposite gender, an outcome few would embrace. No one wants to see girls do worse in reading, or boys fare worse in science.

Some may therefore find in these results a strong case for a particular form of single-sex education, where teachers and students share the same gender. However, one should hesitate before drawing such policy conclusions from these findings. They may not be perfectly transferable to single-sex classrooms, where gender dynamics may differ from coeducational learning environments. Moreover, single-sex education may have other drawbacks, regardless of its potential impact on the outcomes examined in this study.

Would more limited interventions prove effective? Much depends on whether the gender impacts are due primarily to interactions within the classroom or more subtle "role-model" effects. If teachers had gender-specific training based on evidence about the different learning styles of boys and girls, could gender effects be limited? What if this training were aimed at combating gender biases in teacher behavior and expectations? My study suggests that gender interactions in the classroom matter, but it is still far from clear exactly why this is so. Perhaps the best policy solution is to keep an open mind about a variety of strategies that neither unequivocally endorse single-sex education nor rule it out of order altogether.

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Is Your Child's School Effective?

Don't Rely On NCLB to Tell You

Checked: No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, Title I: Adequate Yearly Progress
Florida A+ Plan: School Grades

Checked by Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal school-accountability law, is widely held to have accomplished one good thing: require states to publish test-score results in math and reading for each school in grades 3 through 8 and again in grade 10. The results appear to be telling parents whether their child's school is doing a better job than the one across town, in the neighboring city, or across the state.

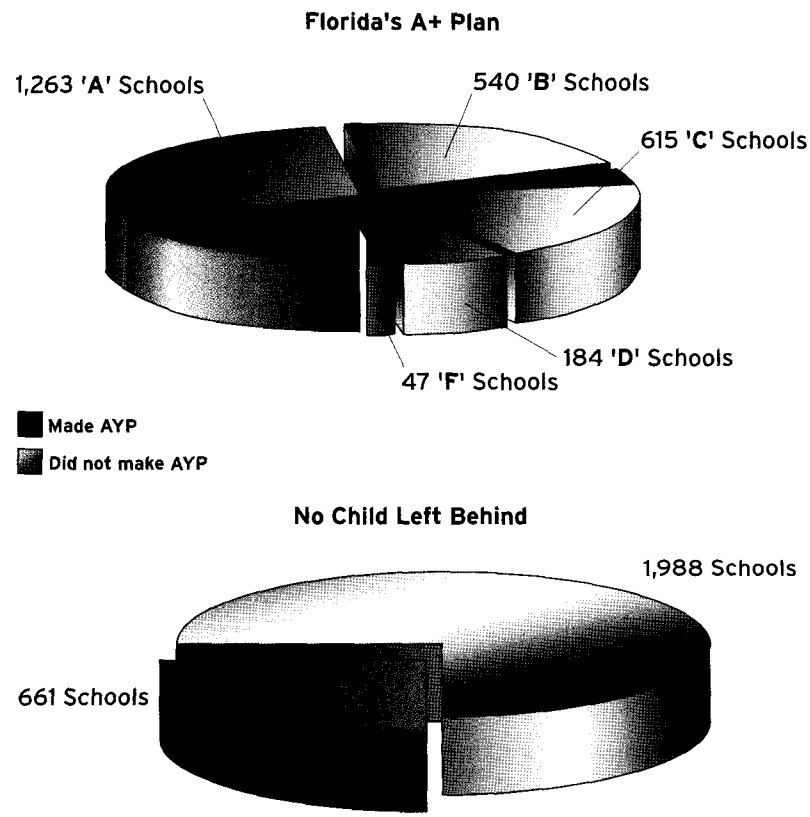
But accountability works only if the yardstick used to measure performance is reasonably accurate. Unfortunately, the yardstick required by the federal law is not. Our analysis of its workings in Florida reveals it to be badly flawed and not as accurate as the measuring stick employed by the state of Florida for similar purposes.

To her credit, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has apparently recognized the need to fix the NCLB yardstick. In November 2005, she announced a pilot program that would allow a few selected states to incorporate student growth into their AYP grading scheme. Although 20 states initially requested to participate, only 2—Tennessee and North Carolina—have so far been given the go-ahead, and the modifications they have been allowed to make are relatively minor. Meanwhile, the yardstick to be used by the other 48 remains as defective as ever.

Part of the problem is that NCLB makes only crude distinctions between schools achieving performance benchmarks and schools not doing so. Florida's grading system divides schools into five different categories, just as teachers do when they grade students on a scale from A to F. (See Figure 1 for the number of schools that received each mark.) Another part

Anatomy of Two Grading Systems (Figure 1)

In 2004 a quarter of all Florida schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Nearly half of Florida's schools earned an A under the state's own accountability system, but a majority of those schools did not make AYP.



Note: Grading based on school performance for 2003-04 school year. Only those schools subject to both state and federal accountability systems are included.

SOURCE: Florida Department of Education

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of the problem is that the federal approach pays only a passing nod to the improvement made by individual students, while Florida's own method takes into account how much specific students have learned in a given year—exactly what parents care about.

It is not that Governor Jeb Bush (and his legislature) got it exactly right, while his brother (and Congress) ran amuck. But there is little doubt that NCLB needs repairing, something that Congress can do when the federal law is reauthorized.

Measuring Quality

Finding the right yardstick is no easy task. Not everyone agrees on what makes for a good school. Some reject test scores, while others care more about building students' character than boosting their academic achievement. But Congress took a clear stance on the issue in NCLB when it determined that a school with subpar student test scores in reading and math is not doing its job. Most Americans would agree that schools should aim to ensure that all students are proficient in these core subjects.

NCLB requires states to divide schools into those making "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) toward the goal of having all of their students proficient in math and reading by 2014 and those that aren't. While the term "progress" would seem to imply that the law considers how much students are learning over time, the federal system in fact is based on a series of snapshots that fail to track individual students from one year to the next. Instead, to make AYP, schools must meet statewide targets for the percentage of students each year who are proficient. Those targets are gradually increased until they reach 100 percent in 2014. The percentage of proficient students within various subgroups, broken out by ethnicity, income, disability, and English-language-learner status, must also meet these same targets. If a school does not make AYP for two consecutive years, parents are given the choice of another school and, after five failing years the school is to be restructured.

But does the AYP yardstick actually distinguish between higher- and lower-quality schools? The answer to this question is best obtained by looking at how much students at the school know at the end of the year, as compared to how much those same students knew one year previously. If students are making large achievement gains, the school would seem to be more effective than if student improvement is meager or nonexistent.

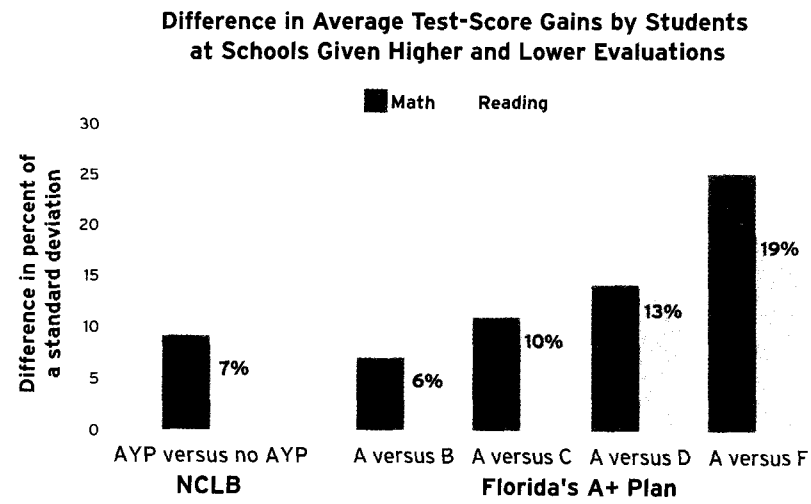
Surprisingly, in much of the United States, it is not possible to track an individual student's achievement over the course of a year to determine how well the federal yardstick identifies schools where students are learning the most. In Florida, however, the topic can be explored systematically because that state's Department of Education has assembled an impressive warehouse of data on student performance. As long as students remain within the state, it is possible to track how well most of them are doing from one year to the next on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), the exam the state uses to comply with NCLB requirements. (Privacy concerns preclude general release of the data, but qualified researchers who sign a confidentiality agreement can apply for access.)

Checking the Federal Yardstick

We drew on this information to calculate how much students learned, on average, in each school in Florida during the 2003–04 school year. We first subtracted from each student's test-score performance the child's demonstrated knowledge the previous year. We then adjusted those one-year-gain scores to take into account a statistical

What's in a Grade? (Figure 2)

NCLB's "either make AYP or not" accountability system does not perform as well as Florida's own A to F grading system in distinguishing schools where students are learning more from those where they are learning less.



SOURCE: Authors' calculations from 2003–04 Florida Department of Education data

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To be wrong nearly three times out of ten does not inspire confidence—especially when one can get it right half the time simply by random guessing.

property that artificially generates larger gains for initially low-performing students (and smaller gains for high performers). Finally, we compared the average gains by students in schools meeting and not meeting the requirements for AYP.

The results were telling. On average, students in schools making the AYP target gained on their math achievement test an amount that was only 9 percent of a standard deviation more than the amount gained by students at schools said *not* to be making the AYP grade. The difference in gains in reading was just 7 percent of a standard deviation (see Figure 2). A full standard deviation's worth of progress equates to about four years of elementary schooling, so gains of 9 percent total a bit more than a third of a school year. A difference of that magnitude is surely worth noting, yet it is hardly enough to warrant saying one school is adequate while the other is not.

Nor is it the case that schools making AYP are those doing a much better job with minority student populations. In math, the differences in gains made by African Americans and Hispanics at AYP schools and non-AYP schools are 11 and 12 percent of a standard deviation, respectively. In reading, the difference in gains for both groups is 6 percent of a standard deviation. Clearly, such differences are not so dramatic as to be the basis for federal intervention.

Schools face varying challenges that depend in part on the populations they serve, so perhaps the federal yardstick does better when those challenges are considered. But that proved not to be the case. When we adjusted the gains made by students in each school to take into account a wide variety of individual and peer-group background characteristics, such as ethnicity, English-language-learner status, family income, and student mobility rates, the yardstick's performance actually worsened. In fact, the apparent benefit of attending a school that had made AYP was only 4 percent of a standard deviation in math performance and just 2 percent of a standard deviation in reading. To be credible, a grading system must do better than that.

Still another way of thinking about the accuracy of the NCLB yardstick is to calculate the probability that AYP identifies correctly the higher-performing of any two schools being compared. Of course, any two-category classification system will get it right 50 percent of the time, by chance alone, just as one can guess correctly half of the time which way a coin will flip.

How much better than chance did the NCLB grading system do in Florida in 2004? In math, a school that made AYP outperformed a random non-AYP school 71 percent of the time. In other words, 29 percent of the time the school in which students are making smaller gains is the one that passed AYP, a pretty hefty error rate (see Figure 3). In reading, that error rate was 28 percent. To be wrong nearly three times out of ten does not inspire confidence—especially when one can get it right half the time simply by random guessing.

So error-prone an emissions-testing program would soon invite the wrath of the auto-owning public.

Testing Florida's Approach

But can any other accountability system, especially one put together by a legislative body, do any better? Are we using the perfect to criticize the good? We can check this by comparing the federal yardstick with the one used by Florida as part of its state accountability system.

Florida's A+ Plan for Education (A+ Plan) rewards schools for ensuring that their students reach a minimum level of proficiency in math and reading, just as NCLB does. But unlike the federal grading system, the A+ Plan bases half of its points on the percentage of students in each school who improved their performance against state standards over the previous year. Equally important, it divides schools into five easily recognized categories that range from A to F, instead of just the two bureaucratically labeled categories employed by the federal government.

The Florida accountability system has its own limitations. But by having five categories, A through F, it provides parents and taxpayers with a good deal of useful information. Admittedly, some of the finer distinctions attempted by the Florida A+ grading scheme do little better than the federal AYP grading scheme. In 2004, for example, average learning gains in math were only 7 percent of a standard deviation higher in A schools than in those given a B (see Figure 2).

But the performance of the A+ Plan

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improves when schools are assigned significantly different grades. The math learning gap between A and C schools was 11 percent; between A and D schools it was 14 percent, and the gap between A and F schools differed by 25 percent of a standard deviation. Put in more familiar language, the one-year difference between A and F schools amounted to more than a full year's worth of learning. In reading, the differences were almost as large.

As with AYP, we calculated an error rate for the Florida grading system, the chance that one would make a mistake—that is, pick a school where average learning rates were lower—if one picked a school solely on the basis of its official grade. Once again, the Florida A+ Plan can be seen to be employing a more accurate measuring stick than the NCLB one, where the error rate, it should be remembered, was nearly 30 percent. Under Florida's own accountability plan, parents would make an error 30 percent of the time if they chose an A school over a B school on that basis alone. But as Figure 3 shows, mistakes happen much less frequently if one picks an A school rather than a C, D, or F school. Indeed, one can have as much confidence in Florida's distinction between an A and an F school as the Food and Drug Administration requires when evaluating drugs subject to rigorous clinical trials.

The Florida system also does a better job of isolating the seriously defective schools, helping state and local officials identify exactly where attention is needed. In 2004, only 47 of the state's 2,649 schools were given an F, while 184 were given a D. Meanwhile, under the federal yardstick, 75 percent of schools did not make AYP, including more than half of the schools Florida had given an A (see Figure 1).

As these numbers suggest, having two accountability systems operating simultaneously has generated a great deal of confusion in Florida, as it has in other states. Things could be improved by melding both systems into one, but only if the revised system can do a better job of identifying schools where student achievement is rising and of isolating the worst-performing schools for remediation.

A National Problem

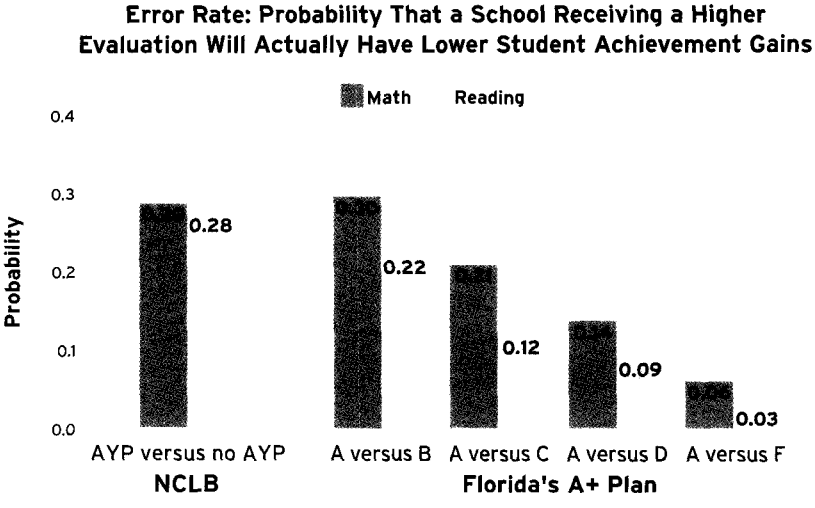
The shortcomings of the federal law's yardstick have a ready explanation. Because NCLB schools are evaluated primarily on the basis of achievement *levels*, the evaluation cannot readily detect how much *growth* is taking place within a school, simply because children come with dramatically different educational endowments. The correlation between school average levels and growth in the 2003–04 school year was just 0.63 in math and 0.71 in reading—a positive relationship, to be sure, but hardly one on which to construct a meaningful accountability system.

Some may argue that our focus on student growth is misplaced, that Congress, when devising its formula for gauging AYP, did not intend to distinguish good schools from less-effective ones. Its sole aim was to make sure that every school would by 2014 bring every student up to proficiency, and a level-based system is needed to direct reformers' attention to those schools and districts with the farthest distance to go.

But such claims are difficult to square with the legislators' designation of schools as not making "Adequate Yearly Progress," much less with the fact that the law gives families the option to attend another school if their

Error-Ridden (Figure 3)

When a school that is said to be making adequate yearly progress under NCLB is compared to one that is not, the chances are nearly 30 percent that students are learning less at the more highly rated school. This error rate under the Florida plan is just as high when A and B schools are compared, but it dwindles when A schools are compared to those given lower grades.



SOURCE: Authors' calculations from 2003–04 Florida Department of Education data

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The Florida A+ Plan employs a more accurate measuring stick than does NCLB.

school twice fails to make AYP. Why let families move to another school without evidence that their children will learn more at the new address?

Of course, we have direct evidence about how the NCLB grading system is playing out from only one state. But scholars from the Northwest Evaluation Association have similarly documented the loose connection between growth scores and the level-based measures of school performance that underpin the AYP grading system in their database of 840 schools in 22 states, suggesting that the problem we have identified is hardly limited to Florida. Since the federal yardstick fails to zero in on how much each student is learning, it can hardly be otherwise.

It must also be admitted that most states could not have used growth scores when NCLB was enacted, simply because most states had not constructed the tracking system Florida has put together. Congress may have done all that it could in 2002. But since other states are now beginning to build their own warehouses of data that follow the progress of individual students, the time has arrived when a legislative fix should be feasible.

It will take Congress to do the job, since the original law was written with such specificity that it is virtually impossible to correct it through administrative action alone. Experienced authors know there's no such thing as good writing—only good rewriting. Let's hope that when NCLB is reauthorized Congress can avoid partisan bickering and use the information coming back from the states to improve on their first draft. People deserve to know that when the federal government says a school is not working, it means it.

Paul E. Peterson is professor of government at Harvard University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Martin R. West is an assistant professor at Brown University. Both serve as editors of Education Next.

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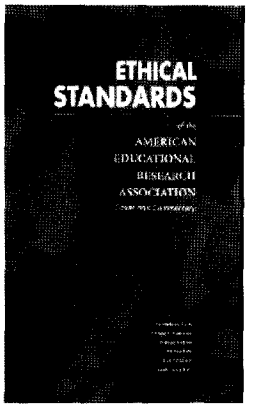

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Battling the Progressives

What you don't know will *hurt you*

The Knowledge Deficit: Closing the Shocking Education Gap for American Children

By E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

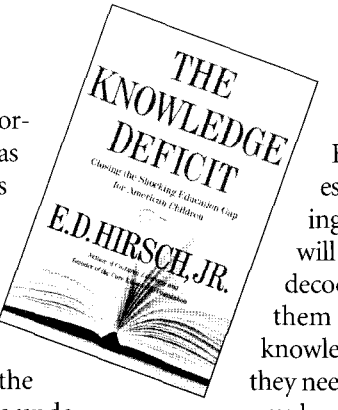
Houghton Mifflin, 2006, $22.00; 169 pages.

As reviewed by Diane Ravitch

This is the first time that I feel compelled to acknowledge from the get-go that I am a frank partisan of the ideas in a book I am reviewing. I am a member of the board of the Core Knowledge Foundation, the nonprofit organization created by E. D. (Don) Hirsch, Jr., to promote the goals of a knowledge-based curriculum. I receive no compensation other than the pleasure of seeing more children gain access to this excellent curriculum. I agreed to join the board when invited because I believe that Don Hirsch's knowledge-based program encapsulates the best hope for the future of American education.

The Quest for Cultural Literacy

The Knowledge Deficit is Hirsch's third attempt to explain why schools should teach a coherent, carefully considered, knowledge-based curriculum. In his first book on this subject, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, published in 1987, he explained why all children and adults need to learn the words, phrases, idioms, ideas, and other information that are an essential part of contemporary society and culture. He explained that simply teaching skills was not enough; that people actually need a large body of knowledge and information in order to read and understand the world they live in. At the end of the book was a long list of words and expressions in an appendix titled "What Literate Americans Know." A surprise bestseller, the book generated enormous controversy, and Hirsch was denounced by many academics as, along with other insults, an elitist and an apologist for the canon of dead white males.



Hirsch had always seen himself as a political liberal and was taken aback by the critics' harsh words, but he was undeterred. In his second book in this series, *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), he described in fulsome terms the insular "thought-world" of progressive education, based in the nation's schools of education, which had miseducated teachers and administrators for decades. Our schools did not have a knowledge-based curriculum, he contended, because they were under the sway of certain bad ideas, which he called naturalism and formalism. Naturalism is the romantic notion that all children are motivated to learn and, if left to their own devices, will make wise choices about what and how to learn. Formalism is the belief that the schools should teach certain procedural skills—like reading and critical thinking—that can be transferred to any situation, and that the schools must avoid teaching "mere facts" or "mere knowledge."

Taking on the Progressives

In this, his third book on the subject, Hirsch has once again entered the fray, this time to demonstrate with supporting research that students will not learn to read with comprehension unless they have acquired a large fund of background knowledge. Furthermore, he shows that the achievement gap between students from different racial groups will continue to be large unless students of all groups are educated with a knowledge-based curriculum. Even the use of the latest, research-based reading programs, he shows, will only teach children to decode, but it will not give them the broad and deep knowledge of the world that they need to read increasingly complex texts in any subject.

In his assault on the precepts of progressive education, Hirsch enters a battle that has been waged for over a century. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, almost every high-school student studied Latin. Teachers and parents believed that the study of Latin taught certain skills that could be transferred to any other pursuit or activity, such as precision, judgment, logical thinking, clarity, and so on. It was, in the words of its defenders, a valuable form of mental gymnastics, intended to improve one's faculties. The same argument was made for algebra and other areas of advanced mathematics. The first generation of education psychologists (such as Edward L. Thorndike of Teachers College) took aim at this belief and sought to demonstrate through their studies that "transfer of training" was a myth, and that there was no reason at all to study Latin or any subject that was not immediately useful.

Progressive educators were heartened by Thorndike's work and concluded that "you study what you study, and you learn what you learn." In other words, what was the point of learning Latin or algebra or even history since they had no demonstrable utility? In 1958, Walter Kolesnik showed that the research that allegedly "exploded" mental discipline (as advanced by Thorndike and others) was deeply flawed, but his work was ignored by progressive educators.

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In this century-old debate, the great error of traditionalist educators was their failure to defend cultural values in education, that is, the importance of knowledge. By making the case for Latin or history dependent on "transfer of training," they lost the debate. The culturally important studies such as literature, history, and foreign language never should have been defended for their value in "training the mind," but for their importance in shaping an educated, civilized human being.

Hirsch now makes that case, and it is a very important contribution to American education. He shows that research is now firmly on the side of those who advocate knowledge as the goal of learning. In a curious reversal of history, progressive educators now find themselves defending "transfer of training," the belief that the practice of critical thinking will ensure that the student is able to think well about other things in the future. In this formulation, what a student learns is irrelevant so long as the student is doing something that really interests her. As Hirsch shows, this belief in formalism leads to dull practice in summarizing, predicting, clarifying, and other mindless and unnecessary activities in the teaching of reading, but it does not lead to a knowledgeable person who reads widely and with deep comprehension.

As I said at the outset, I need no convincing. I believe that E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has become an indispensable figure in American education, and that the curriculum he has developed over the past 20 years—the Core Knowledge curriculum—restores the essential ingredients of a solid education, including history, literature, science, mathematics, art, and music. He now demonstrates that the same kind of education is necessary to cure the well-documented reading deficiencies of large numbers of students, and that is icing on the cake.

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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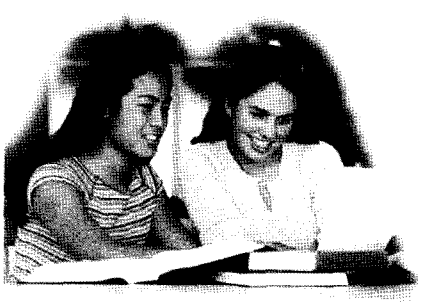

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Beyond the Melting Pot

Two well-regarded liberals take on multiculturalism

Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers

By Kwame Anthony Appiah

W. W. Norton, 2006, $23.95; 196 pages.

Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny

By Amartya Sen

W. W. Norton, 2006, $24.95; 215 pages.

As reviewed by Nathan Glazer

The books reviewed here are the first to be published in a series titled "Issues of Our Times," edited by the omnipresent Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., whose picture, with a brief statement, prefaces each. The volumes are by two prominent intellectuals who stand at the height of academic life in the West, and who, because of their origins in Africa and India, are thought of as spokesmen, in some of their work, for the third world, a role they accept. They were both educated at Cambridge University in England and hold major appointments in leading American universities.

Kwame Appiah, a professor of philosophy at Princeton, formerly at Harvard, has written books in technical philosophy and on current issues of race and multiculturalism. Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics, is university professor at Harvard, formerly master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and also a philosopher, with a prodigious and influential bibliography on technical issues in economics, welfare economics, economic development, social philosophy, the role of the non-Western world in world civilization, and the importance of Indian thought and science, among other topics.

I was alerted to the idea that something of interest to educators was going on in this series when Appiah presented the major thesis of his book in an article in the *New York Times Magazine*. It was summarized starkly on the front cover of the publication as favoring "individuals" against "peoples," the "mixed" against the "pure," "modernity" against "authenticity," "rights" against "traditions," "contamination" against "preservation." And Sen, in his title alone, is clearly taking a critical stance against "identity." What's going on here? We are used to attacks on multiculturalism (now so solidly established in social studies in elementary and high schools) from the right, from conservatives who are alarmed at a diminution of loyalty to the nation as other loyalties are promoted. But criticism from these leading intellectuals who are certainly liberal at the least?

A Sophisticated Pollution

Indeed, both authors look skeptically at multiculturalism, which we know can mean many things, but they are as critical of hard multiculturalism, which makes a fetish of the notion that each major race or ethnic group or religious group carries a distinct culture that should be preserved and promoted, as of soft multiculturalism, which simply promotes tolerance and understanding of one group for another. Not of course that either is against tolerance and understanding: How could they be, as an Indian and an African coming years ago to England to be educated, and dependent on Western tolerance and understanding—which from their accounts was less evident in the past than today? But in soft multiculturalism Sen in particular sees an essentialization of one identity, generally the religious. This raises some difficult problems for a society based on reasoned discussion among persons who bear many identities and privilege none. That is the society Sen would like to see promoted in our schools.

Appiah would agree (both refer to the other's works favorably). What he prefers for our increasingly "mixed" societies is "cosmopolitanism," which goes well beyond tolerance and understanding to a more active interplay among groups and individuals in which traits are generalized to the point where they cannot be identified as being of one group or another. Yes, "contamination"—so it would appear to the religious or cultural purist—is a positive good for Appiah. Sen coins the term "plural monoculturalism" for what I have called "hard" multiculturalism and criticizes developments in British education that are promoting such plural monoculturalism. Britain has for a long time been among the most "multicultural" of the European countries, offering citizenship, voting rights, and equal access to housing, education, and welfare to immigrants from the former empire. Sen applauds this achievement. But recently Britain has begun providing public aid to Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu schools. How could it not when it has long given public support to Catholic and Protestant and Jewish schools?

Distinguishing the Ethnic from the Religious

But to Sen, Britain has been trapped by this practice into taking religious identity as primary, and into fostering this identity, because these schools will teach the tenets of their distinctive religions to young minds incapable of making mature judgments.

Sen is of course no British nationalist. (He is a citizen of India.) It is not because of the weakening of a common

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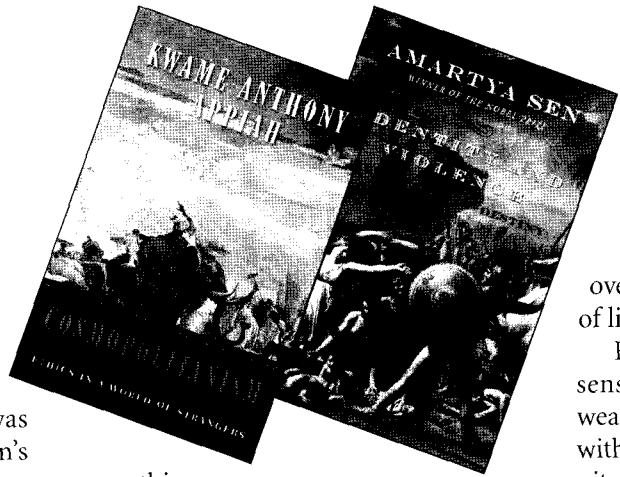

British identity that he views this development with alarm. Lord Tebbit pronounced that the proper test of integration for the British immigrant and his children was whether they cheered for Britain's cricket team when it played against a Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, or Caribbean squad. Not so for Sen. Indeed, he tells us he has on occasion cheered the Pakistani team when it played India. What worries him is the strengthening of an identity present at birth, rather than chosen through free and reasoned choice, and implanted among children before they have the opportunity to use reason and engage in discussion. And these identities have become on occasion in the last half century the basis of murderous violence against others. He asks why, when Tony Blair acts to promote tolerance and understanding among communities, he reaches out to their religious leaders, rather than to those engaged in civil pursuits. Sen could make the same criticism of President Bush, who in the wake of 9/11 posed with Muslim clerics at the White House to dampen anger and hostility against Muslims. Sen would insist a Muslim is more than just a Muslim, and this identity should not be taken as central, all-determining.

Sen concentrates on Britain because he was there when the issue became urgent with the publication of the report of the "Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain," chaired by Lord Bhikhu Parekh. It favored for Britain "a looser federation of cultures held together by common bonds of affection...." But this was more or less what Ali Mazrui wrote 15 years ago in the report of a commission on multiculturalism in New York State schools, and it provoked the same counterattack from those who saw this as weakening a necessary common loyalty to the existing state. This does not bother Sen, who rather hopes for a widening global consciousness and concern for others: his fear is that religion-based separate identities will be strengthened. Fortunately, we are protected from that in the United States, where we have such strong constitutional limits on allowing religion into the public schools. But I think Sen (and Appiah, too) would find the replacement of religious identity with ethnic and racial identity, which is fostered with a heavy hand in various parts of the curricula common in American schools, just as limiting, binding students into one standard uniform when they might prefer to wear others, or none.

Identity Politics

Sen often lists a catalog of possible identities that any one individual may bear when he criticizes taking one identity as central or determining or unchanging. Sometimes in these catalogs of identities the trivial is listed along with the more significant. Yet at any given time, one identity may become central and nothing else matters: like the identity Jewish in Nazi Europe. Or the identity Hindu or Muslim in the murderous rages that accompanied India's partition and independence, which the young Sen witnessed. One understands why he wants to resist the hypostatizing of one identity: yet for much of the world the religious or racial or ethnic identity is overwhelming, and becomes a matter of life and death.

For both Sen and Appiah, one senses a leaning over backwards to weaken the identification of Muslim with an enemy of the West and modernity, or African with the primitive. Fair enough, but sometimes this goes too far. So Appiah, trying to make his readers understand an African practice they will find abhorrent, rehearses the arguments those who practice female genital cutting will give to counter criticism, but then continues: "I am not endorsing these claims.... But let's recognize this simple fact: a large part of what we do we do because it *is* just what we do. You get up in the morning at eight-thirty. Why *that* time?" One detects the influence of training in recent English philosophy, which often uses too trivial examples (what time you get up, for example) to make important points.

The larger mission of both books is to counter narrow and simple identities, to celebrate a modern world of contact and mixture and diversity in which no culture belongs just to one people or religion or nation. Appiah makes a powerful and surprising argument against the idea that the cultural artifacts of long-gone civilizations uncovered in archaeological digs should belong to the nation that currently occupies that ground rather than the world. But a world consciousness as yet is found only among a favored few. And we will have to live for a long time with many who do privilege just one identity, even one that may well foster violence.

Nathan Glazer is professor of education and sociology emeritus at Harvard University, and co-author, with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, of Beyond the Melting Pot *(1964).*

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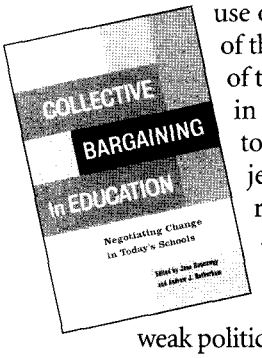
BOOK ALERT

Collective Bargaining in Education: Negotiating Change in Today's Schools. Edited by Jane Hannaway and Andrew J. Rotherham (Harvard Education Press).

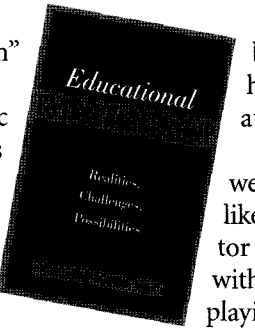


It is not clear what justifies use of "change" in the title of this book. Since the days of the Luddites, it has been in the nature of unions to oppose anything that jeopardizes worker prerogatives, and virtually every essay in the volume concedes that school boards are too weak politically to impose reforms. Even the most pro-union of the essays promises little more than a hope for a better collective-bargaining future.

Still, this well-edited volume is noteworthy for the gap it fills. The book documents the rise of public-sector unionism in an era when private-sector unions are dying; exposes the political fragility of school boards; and, inadvertently, reveals that the power of unions extends well beyond the bargaining table, even to the point of shaping education research itself. The editors candidly tell us that "as we were seeking support for the project and recruiting authors, more than one person wished us well and told us this was an important avenue for inquiry but just too hot for them to touch."

Educational Entrepreneurship: Realities, Challenges, and Possibilities. Edited by Frederick M. Hess (Harvard Education Press).

"This is the era of educational entrepreneurship," declares *Education Next* editor Frederick M. Hess. Should we care? Hess makes a compelling case that innovative endeavors like Teach For America and Edison Schools differ from "flavor of the month" reforms.



Whereas the public school bureaucracy is capable of incremental change at most, education entrepreneurs see beyond long-established barriers and disrupt the status quo. But the volume is not overly optimistic about their impact. Hess admits that many entrepreneurial efforts are apt to fail, making support for them a risky proposition. Still, the volume does an admirable job depicting some of the more entrepreneurial people in education today and imparting enough information to suggest which of these efforts will pay off—and which will disappear.

Charter Schools Against the Odds: An Assessment of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. Edited by Paul T. Hill (Hoover Institution Press).

Charter schools today are an important part of the education landscape, but they are not as influential as some once hoped. Why? Paul Hill, in his introduction to this volume, argues that this is due in part to the difficulty encountered in starting new schools, but also because the playing field has been tilted more sharply against charter schools than the enthusiasts first understood. The assorted chapters take a close look at factors that have inhibited the growth of charter schools. Many of the supply-limiting elements are rooted in state laws; others have been devised by opponents of charter schools, particularly teachers unions and school boards, which have worked hard to thwart charter schools at every turn.

The charter movement, though well launched, Hill argues, is not likely to become a much larger factor in American public education without serious efforts to level the playing field. And in the book's final chapter, he suggests how laws and policies can be changed to give charter schools a fairer chance at success.

Our School: The Inspiring Story of Two Teachers, One Big Idea, and the School That Beat the Odds. Joanne Jacobs (Palgrave Macmillan).

Education critic and commentator Joanne Jacobs has done a service with this unabashedly subtitled book. Jennifer Andaluz and Greg Lippman are the two teachers. The school is Downtown College Prep (DCP), a charter high school for underachieving Hispanics in San Jose, California. The big idea was starting it. And what is so inspiring is that they beat the odds. Jacobs is a brassy partisan (and school volunteer), but that qualifies her to write an impassioned, informed inside story. Charter boosters need to know, though, that DCP's success entailed plenty of luck as well as pluck. What if Andaluz and Lippman had never met a dying priest who provided them space for the school? What if the San Jose Unified School District had not come through with crucial, if modest, financial support? Such serendipity makes for good drama but doesn't build large numbers of charter schools.

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The Cure

Will NCLB's restructuring wonder drug prove meaningless?

BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

This past spring, the U.S. Department of Education released data showing that approximately 1,700 public schools across the country were eligible for "restructuring" under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for 2005–06. That's up 42 percent since 2004–05, and the numbers are likely to continue to surge. After all, some 25,000 schools did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the law last year; those that miss the mark for five years running will also find themselves facing an overhaul. Assuming a steady rate of growth in the failing category, there could easily be as many as 5,000 of these schools in need of restructuring, or at least eligible for it, by 2008–09, the earliest date that most observers believe the federal law will be reauthorized.

What can be done? What *should* be done?

One of the greatest frustrations for reformers so far has been the government's eagerness to put these failing schools on life support rather than forcing them to radically change their ways. According to Center on Education Policy case studies in California and Michigan, officials are using an NCLB loophole, opting for superficial interventions—such as hiring improvement "coaches" or changing the curriculum—over implementing the bold reforms envisioned by the law's crafters.

Which bold reforms? Two strategies are particularly attractive: reopening these schools as charter schools, or contracting with a for-profit or nonprofit manager to run their day-to-day operations. A combination of the two could be especially powerful. Imagine a school district shuttering a failing school for a year. Meanwhile, a company such as Edison Schools or a nonprofit such as KIPP applies for a charter to run a replacement school out of that very facility. A new, effective school has been transplanted into an old, failing one.

Of course, there are numerous impediments to that sort of fresh-start approach. Districts jealously guard their facilities, even when they are underused or decaying. Teacher unions fight to block new charters, especially the vast majority that do not fall under collective bargaining. And neither the feds nor the states are forcing districts to head down this promising but politically painful road.

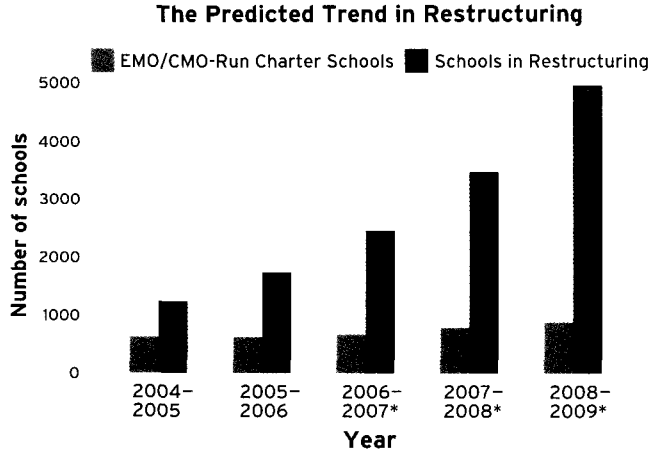
But the biggest impediment may be that there aren't enough school-management organizations to go around. Not by a long shot. Over the past five years, the number of schools operated by for-profit education-management organizations (EMOs) grew at an annual rate of about 9 percent. Nonprofit charter-management organizations (CMOs) are just now scaling up; the sector increased 30 percent over the past two years. With similar growth trends going forward, only 250 additional privately managed schools will come online by 2008–09, while more than 3,000 schools will likely enter restructuring.

Can philanthropy help close that gap? The Charter School Growth Fund, seeded by the Pisces and Walton foundations, among others, aims to create 100,000 seats in high-performing charter schools by 2015. Still, assuming 400 students per school, that only works out to another 250 schools—and not for almost a decade.

Although transplants for failing schools should be attempted and then perfected, reformers are going to need to come up with Plan B for the vast number of schools in restructuring; they are going to need to get healthy on their own.

Demand Outstrips Supply

Even though education-management organizations and charter-management organizations could save many schools in need of "restructuring," there simply aren't enough of these new enterprises to go around.



*Estimates, based on recent growth.

SOURCES: "Schools eligible for restructuring" data for 2004–05 and 2005–06, U.S. Department of Education release, as of March 2006. EMO data include schools run by all known companies from Alex Molnar, David Garcia, Carolyn Sullivan, Brendan McEvoy, and Jamie Joanou, "2006 Annual EMO Report," Arizona State University, Commercialism in Education Research Unit (Tempe, AZ: May 2006). CMO data compiled by Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and represent schools associated with Green Dot, Achievement First, KIPP, Aspire, Uncommon Schools, YES College Prep, and Mastery Learning Institute

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The English Teacher

When the lack of a cohesive curriculum comes back to bite

BY THOMAS WAGNER

I retired in 2002, after 29 years as a public-middle-school English teacher in Jackson Heights, Queens, a stable working-class neighborhood in New York City. During the course of my teaching tenure, I came to some conclusions about my beleaguered profession (more careworn as the years progressed), including that learning to use language could not be entirely unlike learning to dance, repair computers, or do brain surgery. I noticed that it required a rigorous, continuous sequence of concept building through listening, practicing, memorizing, and repeating, and that English teachers, like physics teachers or math teachers, had to be focused, well-prepared, and *specific* about what must be taught. Just telling teachers to "use their creativity" and hoping that all particulars would be covered was institutionalized wishful thinking.

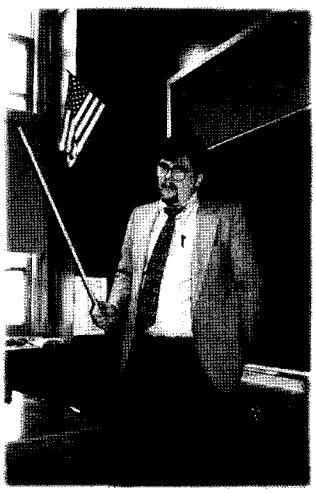

PHOTO COURTESY THOMAS WAGNER

At no time during my 30 years in the classroom had I ever been informed what I was actually supposed to teach.

Yet at no time during my 30 years in the classroom had I ever been informed what I was actually supposed to teach. Poetry? Transitive verbs? Letter writing? "Do what you want," I was, in effect, told. "If in doubt, go to the language-arts book room and see if you can find a complete set of some textbook and use it as your guide."

In my final year, the assistant superintendent dropped by my class with the principal and later told her that it was nice to see a teacher still teaching grammar. There was no hint that a curriculum policy might be re-examined—just a wistful comment about the winds of change. To get to the point, there is *no* sequential program of language development that can be assumed in the New York City public-school system. While the word "curriculum" is now in vogue, there is little awareness that this might require the actual specification of academic content to be taught in each grade.

That this near-anarchic approach to teaching English had repercussions was brought home to me in the year following my retirement, when I was hired by my union, the United Federation of Teachers, to teach two sections of a six-session course to prospective teachers. The class was designed to help them pass the essay part of the New York State Teacher Certification exam. My students—all college graduates—were generally bright, dedicated, decent people, but most of them had a lot of difficulty organizing their thoughts into the form of a short essay and a limited knowledge of the mechanics of writing.

In fact, most of my students had already failed the licensing exam. Why? This was not rocket science: sentence patterns, paragraph structure, punctuation, transitions. But, then, why should they have been expected to be capable writers when the Department of Education, which had these same folks as a captive audience for more than 2,400 days of schooling when they were students, had never considered that subject-verb agreement or use of the comma might have been squeezed in among the "activities" as essential requirements? And apparently nobody in their schools of "education" seemed to think that preparing a person to teach might include knowing how to write a paragraph. But now the real world loomed large. They had failed the teacher's exam and the fluffy jargon about "enhancing group activities" had to be put aside so that I might prepare them to get a teaching job.

All of this was to be accomplished in six three-hour sessions.

Of course, this instruction should have been prescribed when they were in elementary school. There is now great pressure to lift scores in writing and reading, but still little interest in determining how.

Thomas Wagner is a retired New York City public-school teacher as well as a former taxi driver, debate coach, union leader, and member of the San Antonio Golden Gloves.

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